

## MCC: What Our Partners Are Saying

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### **Simon Pierre Adovelande, Coordinator of the Benin MCA team**

In August 2004, over a hundred organizations from all the regions of Benin gathered for the first time to receive information on the new approach to assistance offered by the Millennium Challenge Account of the United States of America. Over the course of more than three hours during the first meeting, the civil society representatives met with the group appointed by President Kérékou to coordinate Benin's MCA proposal to learn about the concept and to insist on their participation in the process of formulating Benin's program. The intensity of the discussions showed just how great the interest was in this new approach to development assistance, an approach that focuses on accelerating economic growth to reduce poverty. At the end of the debates, it was decided that the civil society organizations together would name three representatives to work within the MCA-Benin National Committee. This same decision was made by other components of Beninese society, namely trade unions, the private sector, the agricultural sector, and craftsmen, all of whom appointed representatives within the National Committee.

Women from the region of Mono discuss the MCA-Benin Program



The Benin MCA Compact Program is the result of the reflections of all the Beninese who participated and identified constraints to economic growth, not only through debates and meetings, but also during visits to rural areas and in response to broadcasts on the national radio. It was during one of these meetings that a group of village women from the region of Mono shared with the technical team how land conflicts and customary law prevented them from generating income from their small businesses. During these meetings the women proposed that the

government raise awareness about women's equality under Beninese family law, which is not broadly understood or recognized. The women also suggested integrating existing land laws into a single legal code. These recommendations are reflected in the Compact through the Access to Land and Access to Justice projects.

The participation of all of these segments of Beninese society made it possible to develop *for the first time in Benin* a program whose design is based on the direct concerns of the recipients and that outlines how they will be affected by its anticipated results.

This new approach makes the MCC Compact with Benin a program entirely conceived by Beninese to regulate the constraints of the Beninese economy with American financing. Today the Beninese population has very high hopes for this program because they regard it as their own work supported by the United States, not a program that was created by a foreign donor as has been the case in the past.

The great difference between the MCA-Benin Program and previous development programs is that it addresses, at the same time, all the problems of the chain of development, instead of addressing only one link, and this was made possible because of the large amount of financing available through the MCA. That is one of the most original aspects of the Millennium Challenge Corporation's approach to development.