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**10 Year**  
IMPACT  
**REPORT**  
ACED

# 10 YEAR IMPACT REPORT

Produced by **WRENmedia**

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# Key ACHIEVEMENTS



## Sustainable production for small-scale farmers.

10,000 tonnes of water hyacinth processed into 8,500 tonnes of organic compost.

Water hyacinth compost increased chilli pepper yields by up to 162%, amaranth by 120% and tomato by 42%.



## Benin's urban gardens boost food security.

40 poor urban households empowered to improve their livelihoods through allotment gardening.

Urban gardens in Benin can generate €6,000 per hectare per year.



## Developing inland fisheries.

More than 1,000 inland fishers improved their fishing techniques and local regulations to reduce overfishing and lake pollution.

The roles of inland fisherwomen in the processing and marketing of fish products have been recognized and integrated into fish value chains.



## Reducing GHG emissions.

17 households in Sô-Ava empowered to supply their homes with sustainable biogas energy.

ACED's water hyacinth biogas and compost initiatives have reduced the amount of CO<sub>2</sub>eq released by the plant by 10,000 tonnes.



## Climate adaptation.

Research findings on the climate change responses of local communities have been integrated into academic courses at the University of Moncton. ACED's findings on the climate vulnerability of livestock-based communities are being used by policymakers in the country.



## Youth agribusiness opportunities.

Three flagship ACED publications are facilitating youth integration into profitable agribusinesses and informing youth entrepreneurship policy. More than 500 young people capacitated to develop small agricultural enterprises.

# ACED:

## 10 YEARS OF IMPACT

Following its establishment in 2009, ACED has worked to implement innovative initiatives that increase the food and nutrition security, climate resilience and incomes of Benin's most vulnerable communities.

**JUNE**  
2009

### Where it began

Three young agricultural economists establish a non-governmental organization (NGO) to contribute to solving challenges encountered by Benin's farmers and rural populations.

**SEPTEMBER**  
2011

### Climate action

The team receives its first grant from the Japan Water Forum Fund to improve the climate knowledge of local communities.

**DECEMBER**  
2011

### Naming the non-profit

To reflect the ambitions of the NGO, the team registers the organization under the name Actions pour l'Environnement et le Développement Durable (ACED) - actions for the environment and sustainable development.

**JUNE**  
2012

### Youth empowerment

ACED signs an agreement with the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous People to support a programme on youth empowerment in agribusiness.

**NOVEMBER**  
2013

### Environmental protection

With funding support from the French Global Environment Facility, the International Union for Conservation of Nature-French committee, and Foundation Veolia, ACED implements the first major programme on reducing invasive water hyacinth in Benin's inland lakes.

**JANUARY**  
2014

### A strategy for the future

ACED launches its 5-year strategic plan for the 2014-2018 period.

**MARCH**  
2015

### Research for resilience

A grant agreement is signed with the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research to conduct extensive policy research on the resilience and vulnerabilities of Benin's inland fisheries.

**JUNE**  
2015

### High status

The organization is granted Special Consultative Status by the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council, enabling their meaningful participation at UN meetings.

**MAY**  
2016

### Award-winning initiatives

ACED is awarded the Funding Innovative Capacity Development Initiatives grant by the African Capacity Building Foundation for its youth empowerment project.

**JULY**  
2016

### Urban gardening

Together with partners, ACED launches two pilot allotment gardens in Benin's urban areas to investigate their contribution to reducing food insecurity and poverty.

**MARCH**  
2017

### **Investing in young scientists**

ACED establishes its research fund and awards two grants to junior researchers of the University of Abomey-Calavi.

**JUNE**  
2019

### **Partnership with the Hewlett Foundation**

ACED signs a grant agreement with the Hewlett Foundation to improve evidence use by Benin local governments in decision-making processes related to food and nutrition security.”

**DECEMBER**  
2017

### **A grant for the environment**

A technical and financial support agreement is set up with the Global Environment Facility to help ACED develop income-generating activities from mangrove conservation.

**OCTOBER**  
2019

### **A forum for food security**

ACED organizes the first Evidence-Policy-Action Forum in Benin under the theme: Utilizing Evidence to Improve Food and Nutrition Security in Urban Areas.

**AUGUST**  
2018

### **Reporting on fishery resources**

With the Amsterdam Centre for World Food Studies, ACED launches two reports which constitute the most recent and comprehensive body of evidence on the management of inland fisheries.

**APRIL**  
2019

### **Scaling sustainable agriculture**

To scale up its activities in promoting ecological agriculture in southern Benin, ACED signs a grant agreement with the European Union.

**MAY**  
2019

### **Rockefeller recognition**

The organization is awarded the African Civil Society Organization Excellence Award by EPIC-Africa and the Rockefeller Foundation.

# FORWARD

Since the establishment of Actions pour l'Environnement et le Développement Durable (ACED) in 2009, our mission has not changed; we aim to improve sustainable food and nutrition security in Benin. We also work to develop local solutions that can help address the global challenges of climate change, natural resource degradation, urban poverty, and youth unemployment. The purpose of this report is to synthesize the impacts of ACED's interventions in Benin over the past 10 years.

When the ACED team first formed, we were not fully aware of what it would take to set-up and run a non-profit organization – for instance, how to mobilize resources, or how to create lasting impact. Despite this, after completing the registration process and establishing basic governance and management systems in 2009, we started implementing pilot activities on a small scale. With funding from the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous People, for example, we supported 10 youths to launch agribusiness activities in their rural communities between 2010 and 2012. During the same period, and with support from the UK charity, Artists' Project Earth, we also organized a campaign on climate change to engage Benin's rural communities on issues related to climate vulnerability and adaptation options. In 2013, in partnership with Gevalor, we went on to launch our first fully-fledged initiative on water hyacinth, which was funded by the French Global Environment Facility.

From the beginning, in order to achieve impact over a range of development challenges, our interventions aimed to generate evidence that would influence policy and practice and that, ultimately, would demonstrate to other non-profits how to design sustainable interventions.



To achieve this, we combined research, policy and local action to implement activities that create long-lasting change for the most vulnerable communities. Our initiatives have worked directly with agricultural communities to improve, for instance, smallholder productivity, access to technologies and markets, and resilience to climate change, whilst others have focused on creating income-generating activities through the protection of local resources. Working with various stakeholders, particularly agricultural communities, researchers, policymakers and non-state actors, has been central to the successes highlighted in this document.

We have learned so much in the last 10 years, and confidently embrace the next decade and the opportunities it will bring. For the future, our focus will be to build an effective and sustainable organization by increasing our capacity to deliver results, to improve our governance systems, and diversify our funding sources. In 2030, we hope to publish a similar report – but one that demonstrates more wide-reaching impacts enabled by a stronger organization.

**FRÉJUS THOTO**  
Executive Director

**PASCAL DJHOSSOU**  
Chairman of the Board

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the agricultural communities with whom we have established open and fruitful collaboration over the years. The work we are doing is for these communities and we are very glad and honoured to have contributed to the improvement of their livelihoods. We are also appreciative of their feedback and advice on how to better support them.

To our early funders who supported the organization's interventions from the onset, we are extremely grateful. They include the Japan Water Forum, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous People, the Artists' Project Earth, and the French Global Environment Facility. qu'un groupe de jeunes, réunis autour d'une même volonté de favoriser la prospérité des communautés agricoles locales mais n'ayant qu'une expérience limitée.

These organizations provided financial support to our work when we were just a group of young people with limited experience and a clear vision to see local agricultural communities thrive. Many other funders have since followed and have been instrumental in ACED's achievements; we are very thankful for their support.

We also recognize the work of our technical partners – mainly governments, universities, non-governmental organizations and all the other organizations that we have actively collaborated with to deliver joint solutions over the past 10 years.

## Relevance and CONTEXT

### International development challenges

In recent decades the number of hungry people worldwide had been declining but this is no longer the case. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, more than 280 million people do not have enough to eat, and serious levels of hunger are evident in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup>. As populations in these regions – and worldwide – continue to rise and food demands increase, agricultural productivity needs to grow at an average annual rate of 1.73%<sup>2</sup>.

However, a lack of public sector investment and reliance on rain-fed production systems means that this target is already a challenge for low-income countries. Progress towards tackling all forms of malnutrition also remains unacceptably slow. Worldwide, 150.8 million and 50.5 million children suffer from stunting and wasting, respectively.<sup>3</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa, diets deficient in essential vitamins and minerals due to the consumption of predominantly carbohydrate-based foods is a primary cause of micronutrient malnutrition.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/10/191016074750.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://globalnutritionreport.org/reports/global-nutrition-report-2018/burden-malnutrition/>

By 2050, two-thirds of people are expected to live in urban areas as the promise of prosperity drives rural-urban migration.<sup>4</sup> But, whilst thriving towns and cities are an essential element of a prosperous economy, rapid and unplanned urbanization leads to negative economic, social and environmental problems including poor air and water quality, and issues of sanitation. With rising urbanization and the need for land for roads and buildings, ecosystems also suffer with the loss of vital habitats for wildlife. Essential inland natural resources, such as waterways, also become unsafe for human use due to increasing levels of pollution into these environments, such as household and industry waste.

Climate change exacerbates the existing pressure on natural resources and higher temperatures, drought, and changes in rainfall will impact most on the already vulnerable populations with weak adaptive capacities

and high dependence on basic agricultural production systems. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, these, and other factors, are likely to have severe consequences on Africa's sustainable development prospects.<sup>5</sup>

The future is particularly bleak for the significant numbers of young people who face a future of irregular and informal employment.<sup>6</sup> In the next decade, 1 billion young people will enter the global labour market. With more than 200 million people aged between 15 and 24, Africa has the largest population of young people in the world, which already accounts for 60% of the continent's jobless, according to the World Bank. High levels of poverty thus exist among young Africans even though most need to support their families and work for survival.

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## The case of Benin

Food and nutrition insecurity are serious development challenges in Benin. A 2017 study by the World Food Programme <sup>7</sup> revealed that 9.6% of the population was food insecure, and chronic malnutrition affected 32% of young children. And while almost 80% of the country's population earn a living from agriculture, and thus have the means to produce their own food, limited production diversity, the predominance of small farms, and poor productivity means farmer incomes have remained low. This has inhibited re-investment and development of smallholdings in the country.

Livestock significantly contribute to the Gross Domestic Product of most West African countries and, in Benin, they provide a vital source of income for thousands of households. However, livestock keepers are struggling with the negative effects of climate variability, which reduce

livestock fodder availability and increase the likelihood of disease. In coastal areas, fishing remains the predominant activity but these communities are under threat due to rising sea levels and more frequent flooding as a consequence of climate change.

The inland fishing sector in Benin also faces challenges that undermine its potential to contribute to food and nutritional security. Most notably, these challenges include rising urbanization, pollution, overfishing and a lack of regulations to effectively manage water resources. Benin's mangrove ecosystems, particularly around Lake Nokoué, also need to be better protected. They are currently cut down by rural households for firewood, degrading the resource and the ecosystem services it provides.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/habitats/urban-threats/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/ar4-wg2-chapter9-1.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://plan-international.org/eu/youth-unemployment-facts>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wfp.org/countries/benin>

In just over 10 years, 30 million young Africans are likely to be entering the African labour market each year.<sup>8</sup> In Benin, the labour market is currently unable to support an annual influx of 100,000 university graduates, and only 33% of young people between 15 and 35 succeed in finding paid employment.<sup>9</sup>

The lack of necessary skills and knowledge among young people adds to the issue of limited employment opportunities.



## Meeting the challenges: ACED's response

With a mandate to address development challenges in Benin, ACED's targeted, multi-partnership initiatives engage a diverse range of agriculture, research and development stakeholders. To empower poor urban residents to source their own produce and diversify their diets, ACED is developing allotment gardens in Benin's cities, and is providing evidence-based information to policymakers on how to expand this sustainable initiative. The organization is also working with farmers on how to produce and optimally apply organic fertilizer to increase their vegetable yields and incomes and combat food and nutrition insecurity.

ACED research and publications are highlighting the potential capacity of inland fishing to provide nutritious food and employment opportunities for local communities, as well as how water resource degradation negatively impacts on the fishing sector. ACED is implementing actions to improve the livelihoods of men and women inland fishers and plays a mediating role to help communities organize themselves and get their voices heard so they can inform policy interventions.

By encouraging the collection and processing of water hyacinth into compost fertilizer, ACED is reducing the amount of greenhouse gases

(GHGs) naturally emitted by the plant as it breaks down.

An ACED initiative to produce biogas from water hyacinth is also reducing mangrove wood consumption by rural households for energy purposes. To better understand and address the main challenges that undermine mangrove conservation, ACED has conducted various studies and implemented a three-pronged model that simultaneously regenerates mangrove forests, promotes improved cookstoves and provides income-generating activities for local communities. Climate change vulnerability studies have also been carried out to inform decision-makers on how to tackle climate impacts and support local communities.

Finally, to tackle the problem of youth unemployment in the country, ACED is increasing the availability of easily accessible agricultural information and opportunities through online knowledge exchange platforms. ACED is also building the skills and capacities of youths through e-courses and publications.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/africas-youth-employment-challenge-whats-youth-got-to-do-with-it/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.africa.undp.org/content/rba/en/home/ourwork/povertyreduction/successstories/benin-graduates.html>

## Approach

ACED's interventions have focused on enhancing the productivity of small-scale farming systems, the nutritional status of poor communities and the efficiency of agricultural value chains to achieve its mission of improving food security and nutrition in Benin. Other innovative initiatives focus on reducing GHG emissions and mainstreaming climate adaptation and mitigation research into policy to increase smallholder resilience to climate change.

To achieve the greatest impact from their interventions, ACED adopts a non-linear, three-pronged approach, combining research, action and policy. The first pillar involves the generation of robust evidence through research to enhance understanding of the challenges faced by Benin's vulnerable communities. To deliver on this objective, ACED collaborates with universities and research institutions to produce and disseminate reports and scientific publications.

Research knowledge products are reformulated into actionable policy recommendations

and used to inform practitioners and decision-makers in the areas of agriculture, rural development, urban food systems, resilience to climate change, and environmental preservation.

ACED goes beyond research and evidence use by collaborating with local communities and other agricultural stakeholders in Benin to implement solutions in the field. This approach brings added-value to ACED's research by helping to identify which interventions are more likely to be taken up by communities in the long-term to sustainably improve livelihoods. Working closely with target beneficiaries – farming families – through capacity building sessions and targeted technical support, the organization is able to encourage adoption of innovations and research. This approach also enables ACED to learn from communities and adapt interventions to improve impact.

## Impact

The effectiveness and relevance of ACED's approach can be seen in the tangible results of its interventions. The organization has capitalized on locally-available resources to improve the productivity of smallholder farmers, increase the incomes and food security of poor urban residents, enhance the wellbeing of women-led households, and reduce deforestation and GHG emissions. Through multi-disciplinary collaborations, ACED has also generated and disseminated knowledge in the field of climate

science, increased youth access to agricultural information and business opportunities, and is working towards sustainable change in the inland fisheries sector.

The information in the following section provides a more detailed description of the development problems ACED initiatives have addressed and the outcomes for local stakeholders.

## WATER HYACINTH: an invasive market opportunity

Vegetables represent an important component of the diets of rural and urban households in Benin, but poor soil fertility, land degradation and water scarcity mean yields – and earnings – have remained low. To tackle these challenges in Benin's Lake Nokoué region, between 2013 and 2015, ACED worked to add value to extensive – and invasive – water hyacinth populations, through composting. In partnership with international non-profit, Gevalor, which promotes waste recycling in developing countries, the first year of the initiative saw 144 market gardeners trained and equipped in collecting and processing the plant into organic compost for enhanced fertilization on their vegetable farms. By the end of 2015, 2,232 tonnes of water hyacinth had been processed into 1,300 tonnes of compost, and studies of the initiative revealed that compost use increased chilli pepper yields by up to 162%, amaranth by 120%, and tomato by 42%.

The initiative also provided training to local women in how to produce handicraft objects, such as baskets and hats, using water hyacinth. Twenty-five women are now self-employed as full-time basket weavers, earning up to FCFA 3,000 (€4.60) per item at local markets, whilst a further 25 are receiving additional training to help them diversify their products.

A second phase of the initiative (2015-2017) aimed to increase compost production with a more efficient water hyacinth harvesting technique that uses nets. This new method increased collected quantities by 39%. The second phase also aimed to develop a more efficient vegetable value chain to increase farmer profits and, in 2016, a multi-stakeholder discussion led to the establishment of a sales stall to promote the vegetables. It was expected that this would cut out middlemen involvement and increase margins for farmers.

To support this, a survey was conducted with vegetable consumers on their expectations and needs; the results highlighted the need for



affordable and well-presented vegetable products in order to compete with the alternatives grown using non-organic inputs.

The improved marketing techniques – and an advertising campaign held by the initiative to promote the healthy products – has seen average selling prices increase by 19%.

***“The additional revenues generated by selling agroecological vegetables help me to diversify the diet of my family and contribute to expenses related to our children’s schooling,”*** says Rolande Hounmanon, a gardener from Sô-Ava.

## Evaluating the environmental benefits

The water hyacinth initiative is also delivering environmental benefits as the weed is processed into compost before it has time to decompose and release harmful methane and nitrous oxide into the environment – thus reducing GHG emissions in the area. A first-of-its-kind methodology for evaluating GHG emissions from water hyacinth, both in its natural environment and during composting, has also been developed by the initiative and submitted to Gold Standard <sup>10</sup> – a voluntary scheme for climate and development interventions that certifies GHG estimation methodologies.

***“The ambition to establish a link between the preservation of the global environment and the development of income-generating activities for communities is well aligned with the French Global Environment Facility,”*** says Xavier Duporge, former Secretary General of the French Global Environment Facility, which funded the initiative between 2013-2015.

The initiative was also recognized as the ‘Outstanding Practice in Agroecology 2019’ by the World Future Council and has been featured on international media channels, including France 24, Radio France International and Deutsche Welle.

Looking forward, ACED has developed a scaling up strategy to double the consumption of locally-produced vegetables in south Benin by 2025. ACED has also carried out a review of the organic certification schemes that are available and affordable to smallholder farmers to certify the water hyacinth compost production system.

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## URBAN VEGETABLE GARDENS

boost Benin’s food security

Access to locally-produced, healthy vegetables is also increasingly challenging for people living in urban areas of Benin, where the rising levels of ‘urban-poor’ – and poor female-headed households in particular – are unable to afford nutritious diets. To enhance food security in Benin’s fast-growing cities, ACED launched a research initiative in 2016 around allotment gardens in coordination with the Amsterdam Centre for World Food Studies of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences at the University of Abomey-Calavi.

The initiative created a framework for the development of urban allotment gardens to provide poor urban dwellers, and especially women, with an opportunity to produce and access fresh, healthy food, as well as additional income. \* A randomized control trial was implemented –

the most rigorous of impact assessment methods – to measure the effects.

Two allotment gardens have been established in the cities of Abomey-Calavi and Porto-Novo with funding from the Global Challenges Program of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research. Forty participants from vulnerable households have been provided with gardening equipment and training to produce enough vegetables for both home consumption and income generation. A review of their earnings and food security indicators show that these gardens can generate around €6,000 per hectare per year, and increase the consumption of healthy food and the number of days participants eat two or more nutritious meals.

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<sup>10</sup><https://www.goldstandard.org/>

***"I don't remember the last time I bought vegetables to cook at home. Indeed, since I started farming and harvesting on my plot, I regularly provide my household with vegetables. This has greatly reduced my food expenses and given me more autonomy at home,"*** says Adelaide Kounoukpevi, a participant of the allotment garden initiative.

## Collective action

By collaborating with experienced local gardeners, the research programme was able to advise participants on the benefits of collective action to bulk buy their inputs in order to reduce costs, and jointly sell their vegetable produce to enhance bargaining power with potential buyers. Adopting the principles of collective action is expected to enable the participants to transition from an informal

cooperation into a functional and genuine cooperative.

The initiative also aimed to advise government policy with the development of a site allocation tool to identify further suitable land for allotments, taking into account various factors such as the agronomic and biophysical conditions for vegetable growing, and socio-economic factors such as road accessibility, vicinity to markets and safety for women.

Six publications have also been produced on the benefits and constraints faced by urban agriculture cooperatives, as well as on how policies can identify the urban poor, support the development of urban agriculture and allocate land for urban gardening.

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## ACTION RESEARCH

regulates inland fishing



Rising urban populations in Benin have taken their toll on inland aquatic systems, which have been subject to increased levels of pollution and overfishing, undermining the potential of inland fisheries to contribute to the country's food and nutritional security.

Key challenges include the inadequacy of rules governing the use of inland water resources. An action research programme launched by ACED in 2015 analysed the formal and informal measures of water resource use in Benin, and evaluated the impacts of degraded aquatic resources for fishing communities.

With support from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, and in partnership with Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and the University of Abomey-Calavi, the research programme established a multi-stakeholder committee comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, fishermen and women associations, local agricultural advisory services, the National Partnership for Water, and the municipal association on the management of Lake Nokoué.

This collaboration enabled the integration of various stakeholder perspectives into the research process, and generated sound and relevant knowledge for the fishery communities and policymakers.

## Sustainable solutions

The initiative generated accurate and up-to-date information and evidence regarding: the biophysical characteristics of inland waters; regulatory rules of shared water resources; constraints encountered by inland fisher communities; and the roles and constraints of women involved in fishery activities.

These valuable insights have been used to propose effective solutions for improved resilience and management of inland fisheries, and to inform fishing communities on the regulations around use of shared water resources. As a result, inland fisher communities have started establishing more effective and sustainable rules for managing the inland waters. The government has also implemented actions to limit overfishing and reduce pollution in the lakes.

***“Before the research conducted by ACED, evidence on pollution in lakes was lacking. Now, the materials produced by the programme are of good use to us to engage fishers and policymakers on the challenges posed by the pollution of the lakes and how to overcome them,”*** says David Houngue, Chairman of Benin’s National Federation of Fishers.

Extension service agents from five municipalities have been briefed on the findings to better inform and enhance their advice and engagement with fishing communities. The initiative has also built local capacities in collecting and analysing spatial data to support decision-making in the fishery sector.

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## POSITIONING YOUTHS

to access agribusiness opportunities

As well as enhancing information and knowledge exchange among Benin’s vulnerable communities and policymakers, ACED’s interventions aim to build the capacities of young professionals to facilitate their integration into profitable agribusinesses. For instance, with support from the African Capacity Building Foundation, ACED has produced three flagship publications:

01

A research report to map the profiles of youths interested in agribusiness, i.e. their training and experience, to provide guidance to youth-supporting institutions, such as the National Fund for the Promotion of Enterprise and Youth Employment, to develop targeted interventions that account for the diverse needs of youth;

02

A report to identify and analyse more than 50 business opportunities for youths – with low technical skills and investment capacity – in the pineapple, poultry and fish sectors to highlight agricultural opportunities beyond the primary production stage; and

03

A technical handbook for youth on agricultural entrepreneurship and business skills.

Knowledge generated by these publications has been used by large entrepreneurship programmes in Benin, including the UAC Startup Valley,<sup>11</sup> to help it design interventions in the agribusiness sector.

***“Thank you for the opportunities you share with us. Keep it up! You are doing a great job,”*** says agricultural sciences former student Olivier A.

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## CLIMATE AWARENESS

for smart adaptation

ACED publications have also contributed to the climate change research knowledge pool. For example, in 2014, with funding from the International Development Research Centre, studies were carried out on the vulnerability of Beninese communities to climate variability and change. The studies were conducted in partnership with the University of Quebec in Montreal, the University of Moncton in Canada – which integrated the research findings into its academic courses – and the Ministry of Environment in Senegal; the purpose of these collaborations was to generate lessons and findings that could be applied in Benin. ussi relevé la présence de techniques d'adaptation locales, notamment l'intégration de l'élevage et des cultures, ainsi que l'adoption de la pisciculture par opposition à la pêche de capture.

The research found high levels of vulnerability among Benin's agricultural communities that depend on the livestock sector and coastal resources – but also revealed local adaptation techniques, such as the integration of livestock and crops, and the adoption of fish farming as opposed to capture fisheries, respectively. The studies and their results were presented in Niamey, Niger, at the Fourth Agricultural Science Week of West and Central Africa; in Montreal, Canada, at the 82nd Congress of ACFAS (Association francophone pour le savoir); and in Accra, Ghana, at the Annual Global Development Conference of the Global Development Network. To better disseminate the research regarding Benin's coastal communities to policymakers and researchers, ACED also held a regional workshop in 2015 in Cotonou, Benin under the theme 'Climate Change Adaptation in Coastal Areas: Regional Lessons for Local Actions'.

## Challenges and LESSONS

ACED has faced challenges of different types and magnitudes that have impacted on the ability of the organization to create lasting change in the food security and nutrition sector. Navigating these challenges has yielded the following lessons:

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.uacstartupvalley.com/>

## Influencing policy systems takes time

Recent research by ACED and its partners highlighted high levels of exploitation and pollution of Benin's inland lakes. Recommendations have been provided on how aquatic systems could be better managed to preserve these vital water bodies and maintain the livelihoods of thousands of people who depend on them. Since 2015, policy dialogues and multi-stakeholder discussions on this issue have been organized, but it was only at the end of 2019 that governmental agencies started taking action towards improving lake management. But, whilst policy actions around lake management are finally in progress, decisions are yet to be agreed on how to curb the problem of urban pollution that negatively affects the water bodies.

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## Market-driven approaches improve adoption and scaling out of innovations

Initial interventions by ACED to mobilize local communities to proactively remove water hyacinth from Lake Nokoué were ineffective and unsustainable due to a lack of clear incentives for farmers. As a solution, ACED proposed a market-based approach with training for farmers in water hyacinth compost production to cultivate vegetables for sale at local markets. Since 2013, local communities and farmers have actively collected and processed water hyacinth – mainly as a result of the quantifiable financial benefit from selling their vegetables. Market-driven approaches with a clear business model are thus more likely to produce sustainable solutions and can be instrumental in developing effective scaling out strategies. For the next step, ACED will actively collaborate with for-profit organizations to ensure their initiatives embed inclusive business models that can help improve uptake and sustainability.

## Inclusive partnerships are key in developing lasting solutions

All of ACED's initiatives over the last 10 years have involved collaboration with a variety of stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers, practitioners and farmers, to bring in different perspectives for intervention development. Whilst this approach can lead to some challenges – as different stakeholders often have diverse and conflicting interests – it can also enable the development of context-appropriate and long-lasting solutions.

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## Flexibility in development actions is important

The transdisciplinary and inclusive approach of ACED's interventions encourages input and feedback from partners and beneficiaries. To respond to these contributions and mainstream them within initiative implementation requires flexibility by the team. This is a challenge for organizations like ACED, which generally work under rather rigid, funder-approved frameworks. To address this challenge, ACED initiatives are designed to be adaptive by engaging funders in open and constructive discussions in order to successfully achieve intended outcomes.





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et de la Sécurité nucléaire



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DE DEVELOPPEMENT



**Japan Water Forum**  
日本水フォーラム



FONDS FRANÇAIS POUR  
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**THANKS**  
for your support

## About

### **ACED**

ACED is a nonprofit independent organization established ten years ago in Benin (West Africa).

We envision a world where all communities have a decent life in a sustainable environment.

Our mission is to empower communities with lasting solutions to poverty and hunger in a sustainable environment

we combined research, policies and local action to reduce poverty and hunger among the most vulnerable communities.

We act like a think-and-do tank.

For more information, please visit [www.acedbenin.org](http://www.acedbenin.org)

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# 10 YEAR IMPACT REPORT

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