

**Benin National Assembly Strengthening Program
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USAID/BENIN**

FINAL PROGRESS REPORT

March 1, 2000 – March 2, 2002

**Submitted by
State University of New York
Center for International Development (SUNY/CID)
Formerly the State University of New York
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BENIN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STRENGTHENING PROGRAM

FINAL PROGRESS REPORT FOR MARCH 2000 – MARCH 2002

On March 2, 2000, USAID signed a Cooperative Agreement with the Research Foundation of the State University of New York International Development Group, now known as the Center for International Development, to conduct a 2-year, \$1million legislative strengthening program with the National Assembly of the Republic of Benin.

This two-year legislative strengthening project was designed to (1) increase the legislative and deliberative capacities of the Benin National Assembly members, (2) reinforce the research, management and financial capacity of National Assembly support staff, and (3) improve collaboration between National Assembly members and their constituents.

This final progress report on the Benin National Assembly Strengthening Program provides information on the priorities/activities designed and implemented to enhance participation of the legislative community and their results. It will also speak of the many obstacles and difficulties encountered.

All the activities were meant to produce one outcome, which was bringing Benin's general public closer to the country's National Assembly.

Quarters 1-3 Proposed Activities

The main goal was to stick to the priorities timetable. Quarters 1 – 3, which covered April – November 2000, focused on:

- Activity 1 – Establishment of a liaison office with local staff
- Activity 3 – Design Staff Development Program and Training Plan
- Activity 4 – Development of specialized research and bill drafting services within the National Assembly
- Initiatives towards/with BLP partners
- Initiatives towards actors outside the National Assembly

Results

Activity 1 – Establishment of a Liaison Office with Local Staff

Making itself known as a principal participant of legislative strengthening in Benin, involved the occupation of Duplex Alao by the BENIN LEGISLATIVE PROJECT (BLP) in the Djassin neighborhood in Porto-Novo. It also meant establishing management tools, internal

administrative procedures and methods, which were set in place by the BLP staff under the supervision of the office manager, Ms. Yvonne SOTIKON.

This occupation helped "localize" BENIN LEGISLATIVE PROJECT in its own offices. The initial settling in afforded the pleasure of many visits from BLP partners. Most notably were Linda TRUDEL, supervisor of BLP at USAID-BENIN, the National Assembly Administrative General Secretary accompanied by her spouse, Doctor AVOGNON and the Executive Committee of the Legislative Staff Autonomous Union.

Activity 3 – Design Staff Development Program and Training Plan

The initial strategy involved designing a budget for a workshop, and lobbying the Parliamentary Reform President, Honorable HOUSSOU and the Administrative General Secretary for the study and approval by the National Assembly of a draft of the Accord Tripartite. The Director initiated a search with the National Assembly senior staff in order to find béninois experts who would work together with experts from Québec and lead the Porto-Novo workshop. On October 3, 2000, the Reform Committee President gave his consent to The Tripartite Accord. The Reform Committee instructed BLP to hire consultants instead of the National Assembly designating MPs and staff members as participants and presenters. Since the MPs were not available, it was suggested that the BLP should invite at least 22 participants, which included the staff members. The workshop took place November 13 – 20, 2000, and was a huge success, as noted by outside observers such as Ms. Linda TRUDEL from USAID.

Activity 4 - Development of specialized research and bill drafting services within the National Assembly

The Director decided to start laying the foundations for implementing activities of Priority 4 early. BLP, represented by the Office Manager and Director, held a meeting with the National Assembly's Director of Legislative Affairs on November 16, 2000. The meeting was devoted entirely to specifying the outlines of priority 4's activities. A follow-up meeting was scheduled for November 29, 2000 so they included the participation of other senior members of the Legislative Affairs Service. This meeting was rescheduled for December 13, 2000.

Initiatives Towards/With BLP Partners

From the beginning, normal contact was established and maintained throughout the life of the Project between BLP and USAID, wherein day-to-day updates were provided. Two particular meetings deserve a notable mention. First was Linda TRUDEL's working visit to BLP. This afforded the Director the opportunity to mention numerous meetings held with MPs and staff members, the updating of the Needs Assessment and the adoption of the First and Second Year action plans within the two months schedule. The Director also pointed out difficulties he encountered since the beginning of the project. There were field difficulties, which the Director described as a problem with the budget. He felt the figures/prices used in the Project's budget did not reflect the real prices in Benin, and the budget lacked necessary items. There were also difficulties with regards to the work habits of the National Assembly. The Director mentioned

the continual absenteeism, lack of punctuality and the disinterest shown by some of the BLP partners at the National Assembly.

The second mentionable meeting was the USAID/Benin Democracy and Governance Partners Meeting held November 27-28, 2000 in Cotonou. It allowed BLP to contribute to the design of new indicators for the evaluation of the USAID-BENIN Governance and Democracy team activities.

Initiatives Towards Actors Outside of the National Assembly

Outside of Benin's National Assembly are some key players who can contribute to the attainment of the Project's results. This underlies the many initiatives taken by BLP towards other key actors, such as the press and media houses, other development partners in Benin and foreign parliaments. The goal was to create favorable conditions for obtaining the legislative strengthening results the Project aimed at. Based on this, several actions were set in motion.

- Many members of the National Assembly community expressed concern of not being able to benefit from BLP activities because perfect French speakers did not present them. In July 2000 BLP initiated a cooperation project between the National Assembly of Benin, the National Assembly of Quebec and BLP. This project was formalized under the name of the *Tripartite Accord*, which was initially part of priority 3 activities. Quebec was chosen because of its existing relationships in the francophone framework between the National Assemblies of Benin and Quebec, and because it has the unique edge of supplying French-speaking legislative professionals.
- Initiatives towards journalists and media houses offered an opportunity for them to inform and educate the general public on the parliament, its life, its members and their activities. The BLP Director, Mr. Kango LARE-LANTONE, held discussions with Radio-Tokpa and ORTB, which explored the possibilities of organizing shows in national languages that informed on what goes on in Parliament. On October 5, 2000 Mr. LARE-LANTONE lead a full-day meeting, which he proposed a theme, "*Difficulties Faced by Parliamentary Journalists in the Course of Doing Their Work and Their Own Vision of the Coverage of the National Assembly*". Through this meeting it was agreed BLP would initiate activities aimed at increasing the training and information of parliamentary reporters. The goal in mind was to improve the scope and quality of the National Assembly coverage.

Quarter 4 Activities

This quarter covered the period of December 2000 through February 2001. The activities centered around follow up work for Priority 3, continuation of prep work for Priority 4 and beginning preparations of Priority 5 and 6.

Results

Priority 3 – Setting Up of a Program of Recruitment, Formation, Recycling and Professional Training of the Personnel

The BLP Director held several meetings as follow on to the Porto Novo workshop held in November 2000 (see Activity 3 of the Third Quarter).

- On December 6, 2000 and January 31, 2001 the Director met with the national experts, Mrs. ADONON-HESSOU and M. TOWANOU, to discuss their report, whereby BLP representatives made some substantial comments regarding the form and the substance of the document. A final draft of the report was produced by the Benin national experts and delivered to BLP in February 2001.
- BLP initiated an evaluation meeting of the workshop, which included two main groups of participants: the personnel proper and the administrative hierarchy of the General Administrative Secretariat of the National Assembly. Unfortunately, the administrative hierarchy of the General Administrative Secretariat of the National Assembly was not available. On November 29, 2000 the BLP Director held the evaluation meeting with the second group of participants, who were represented by a delegation of their Union (Independent Union of the National Assembly (SYNAPA)). Those present were: Simon ADEGNICA, Secretary of the Summary Accounts for the Department of Sessions and Questions, Florence ADJOVI of the Commission on Education, Pascal BENON, Assistant to the Director of the Treasury and Administrative Department, Barthelemy BOTON, Head of the Department of Sessions and Questions, Armand CHETAN of the Personnel and Health Services, Bonaventure GUEDEGBE, Chief of the Documentation Division, and Flavien SETONDIL, Chief of the Personnel Division. The Director, Kango LARE-LANTONE, and the office administrator, Yvonne SOTIKON, represented the Benin Legislative Project. Four main points resulted out of this meeting: (1) overall evaluation of the workshop, (2) an evaluation of the performance of the experts and the methodology used (3) evaluation of the organization of the workshop, mainly the hospitality, communications, sound system and non-payment of per diems, and (4) miscellaneous objectives.
- A similar evaluation meeting covering all the same points took place on December 11, 2000 with the Administrative General Secretariat. The participants included Noelie AVOGNON, General Administrative Secretary for the National Assembly; Remy AHOUADI, Director of the Treasury and Administrative Department and Remy KODO, Director of Legislative Services, and the Benin Legislative Project, represented by Kango LARE-LANTONE and Yvonne SOTIKON.

Priority 4 – Setting Up of a Unit for the Research and Writing Texts of Law Within the National Assembly

The initial preparations begin during the course of this quarter. They involved exchange of correspondence, workshop setup and meetings with the Director of Legislative Services and with parliamentary personnel involved in research and writing of law texts. Madame Grace T.

ADONON-HESSOU, Departmental Directress of Labor, assisted with the recruitment of personnel.

Priorities 5 and 6 – Fiscal and Budgetary Workshop

The BLP Director initiated several meetings aimed at preparing the activities for priorities 5 and 6. On December 11, 2000 he met with the Director and the President of the Finances Commission for a briefing on the contents of the activities. On December 14, 2000 the BLP Director and Administrator traveled to Bohicon to establish contact with members of the ONG network for Democratic Government. This was prompted by an invitation of the USAID/Benin Democracy and Governance Team.

Mission Baseline

The goal of the Baseline Mission was to put into place a series of base indicators to evaluate the results of the project's activities. Mr. Edward McMahon, Research Assistant Professor and Director of the Center on Democratic Performance in the Department of Political Science at Binghamton University (SUNY), was approached to lead said mission, which took place January 15 – 18, 2001. The first Benin expert approached to work with Mr. McMahon was Professor Moussa OKANLA, who was recommended by several executives of USAID/Benin. Mr. OKANLA turned down the offer because he felt the fees offered were insufficient. Again at the recommendation of executives of USAID/Benin, BLP approached Dr. Maximilien SOSSOU-GLOH, a sociologist and independent consultant. He agreed to serve as the Benin expert.

Quarter 5 Activities

This quarter was viewed as one of the richest from the standpoint of activities. The activities centered on the realization of the priorities set by the Reform Parliamentary Reform Commission, for example, ongoing activities under priority 3. A

Results

Priority 4 – Conceptualization of a Unit for the Research and Writing Texts of Law Within the National Assembly

Originally scheduled to take place from March 7 – 9, 2001, this workshop suffered numerous setbacks caused by the administrative authorities within the National Assembly. Due to the presidential elections, the National Assembly felt the month of March was not an ideal time. The numerous setbacks also made it impossible for Hannah Shostack of the New Jersey State Legislature to attend. Finally, the dates were set for May 16-18, 2001, and the workshop proceeded. Unfortunately, the participation of the National Assembly personnel was irregular and unreliable. On several occasions it was demanded that several members leave the workshop to deal with urgent matters. Several employees of the Legislative Services chose not to return after the opening of the workshop. They preferred to collect premiums that the Assembly was

paying for them to sit in the amphitheatre as opposed to attending the BLP workshop, which offered none.

Priorities 5 and 6 – Fiscal and Budgetary Workshop

During this quarter, the activities of priorities 5 and 6, *The Analytical Backing Up of the National Assembly's Specialists in Fiscal and Budgetary Matters and The Initialization of Working Relations by the National Assembly with the Benin Institutions of Research*, entered into a concrete stage. Two preparatory working sessions, initiated by BLP, took place in the office of the President of the Finances Commission, the Honorable Guy ADJANOHOON, at the National Assembly on April 2 and 5, 2001. The steps to be taken for priorities 5 and 6 were set up in the form of the timing chart below.

ACTIVITIES	SCHEDULED DATES	
	Start	Finish
Call for communication proposals	9 April 2001	14 April 2001
Meeting re: information and exchanges	19 April 2001 <i>@ 4 p.m.</i>	
Closing date/time to receive proposals	3 May 2001 <i>@ 12 noon</i>	
Technical committee's study of proposals received	3 May 2001	7 May 2001
Committee meeting and publication of list of the ten best proposals chosen	7 May 2001 <i>@ 4 p.m.</i>	
Meeting with the ten pre-selected communicators	9 May 2001 <i>@ 5 p.m.</i>	
Deposit of final communications	11 June 2001 <i>@ 12 noon</i>	
Grand-Popo workshop	19 June 2001	20 June 2001

In accordance with this timing chart, BLP utilized the large circulation of two daily newspapers, *la Nation and le Matinal*, to solicit proposals to be presented during the workshop. They would focus on the subject of instrumentation and efficiency with regard to the project of budget of the Benin Republic for fiscal year 2001. An initial meeting took place at the Benin Legislative Project's office on April 19, 2001 for interested individuals and non-governmental organizations. The participants received copies of the project of budget 2001 and detailed information regarding the outcome of the exercise. Seventeen proposals were received by BLP by May 3, the cut off date. A technical committee composed of Guy ADJANOHOUN, president of the Finances Commission, Estève RUSTICO, Administrator of the Financial Services and Kango LARE-LANTONE, Director of the Benin Legislative Project, met on this same day in order to define the criteria to evaluate the proposals. A second meeting followed on May 7, 2001, at which time the committee deliberated on the ten best proposals. Said authors of these ten proposals were given one month to prepare the final version to be presented at the Grand Popo workshop on June 19 and 20, 2001.

Priority 9 – Holding of Public Meetings Between Deputies and Citizens/Voters Throughout Benin

The Benin Legislative Project set initial activities of priority 9 in motion. A place was selected for the first public meeting, numerous contacts with audiovisual technicians were made and the themes, which would be the subject of the meetings, were chosen. Grand Popo was selected to host the first meeting. It is a large urban center that holds an attraction for tourists in Southern Benin.

It was important to the Director of BLP that the meetings receive publicity by the media. On April 4, 2001 the Director and the BLP administrator met with the director of the LC2 television network, Mr. Moreau, to discuss the possibility of him filming and broadcasting the images and sounds of the meeting. Because LC2 only extends to the coastal strip of Benin, the number viewers would only represent a small section of the non-urban citizens of the country. Based on this, other avenues were explored for media coverage. Mr. Fidele AYIKOE, secretary general of Benin Radio and Television (ORTB) was selected. It was agreed they would cover all of the activities and bear the responsibility for the cost of the team of reporters.

As for the themes, the BLP Director asked several deputies of the National Assembly to list their preferences based on the list provided. This similar approach was also made to some of the civilians who would take part in the meeting. As a result, the following two themes were selected: *The Traffic of Children and Excision*. A preliminary meeting with Mrs. Victorine ODUNLAMI, President of the Inter-African Committee fighting against certain traditional practices bearing on the health of women and children (CIAF Bénin) took place on May 2, 2001.

Observing the March 2001 Benin Presidential Elections

In accordance with an order of the United States of America's Embassy, all USAID/BENIN partners were made participants in the observation of the Benin March 2001 presidential elections. They were involved from the pre-campaign to the voting itself. The BLP Director

and administrator also took part in a post-election evaluation held at USAID/BENIN on April 11, 2001.

Quarter 6 Activities

This quarter was marked by three major events under priorities 5, 6 and 9. This quarter also involved BLP's participation in forums and workshops outside of the activities for the National Assembly, some of which involved *the Traffic of Minors in the Departments of Mono and of Couffo, Reflections on the Elections and Their Media Coverage, as well as the Political Partys' Round Table for the Evaluation of the March 2001 Presidential Elections.*

Priority 5 and 6

The Grand Popo workshop was held June 19-20, 2001 on the theme of *the Efficiency and the Instrumentality of the Budget Project of the Benin Republic exercise 2001.* Those in attendance included sixty participants, thirty deputies, and a delegation of three USAID members headed by Mr. Harry LIGHTFOOT, Director of USAID-BENIN, and included Mr. Ruben JOHNSON, Governance & Democracy Team Leader and Ms. Linda TRUDEL, in charge of USAID Electoral and Legislative Projects.

Although a complete success, the workshop faced numerous problems with regards to setting it up, lodging, transportation and feeding the participants.

The workshop consisted of ten communications delivered by several individuals and entities, such as several University professors, some independent consultants and one ONG (Non Governmental Organization). They were split into four panels and approached the subject from different angles. In particular:

- the efficiency of the project of budget 2001 and the reduction in the poverty level
- the instrumentality of the project of budget 2001
- various alternatives and propositions of lectures of the budget intended for the deputies
- the Document of the Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty
- the role played by Parliament, etc.

Priority 9

Now that the themes were set, it was time to select the best site to host each of the meetings. This would require countless investigations and searches to find actual witnesses and negotiate their participation in the meetings. The BLP Director took charge of the search and set out to visit several localities, which consisted of Lokossa, Dogbo, Bopa, Ayomi and Adjaha. The interviews were recorded on tape, transcribed and later served as the base for the first meeting. The public meeting took place on July 20, 2001 with the participation of ten deputies and approximately 180 individuals, 100 of who were residents of the various communities in Grand Popo.

One week later, the BLP Director and secretary began preparations for the second public meeting. It would require several trips and hours of preparation time by the entire BLP staff. The town of Nikki was chosen as the locality where the meeting would take place. Again, witnesses were found, interviewed and invited to take part in the meeting. They were witnesses to Excision, such as women who had been excised or performed the excisions and customary chiefs.

Departmental Forum on the Fight Against the Traffic of Minors in the Departments of Mono and Couffo

On June 27, 2001, in preparation for the first public meeting on the traffic of children, BLP took part in the Departmental Forum on the Fight Against the Traffic of Minors. The objectives consisted of:

- the inventory of the deep rooted causes of the traffic of minors in the two departments of Mono and Couffo
- to separate the socio-economic impact from the phenomenon
- to find and propose realistic solutions appropriately designed to reduce and eliminate the causes of the phenomenon
- to group the responsibilities by structures, and
- to propose a time chart to implement short and long term solutions.

Quarter 7 Activities

This quarter, which covers September to November 2001, proved to be the most difficult one. Only one out of three activities planned could be realized. Specifically, it was the second section of the activities under priority 9, the Nikki Public Meeting. The other two activities never materialized. They were priority 7, *Evaluation of Public Meetings*, which was slated to combine priorities 8 and 10, *Fiscal and Budgetary Hearing*.

Results

Priority 9 – Holding of Public Meetings Between Deputies and Voters Throughout Benin

Following the success of the first public meeting, the second public meeting took place on September 24, 2001 at the Court of His Majesty, Sero KORA, King of Nikki. Hampered by the local languages (mostly peuhl, batonou and dindi) and the inability of the BLP staff to communicate with the locals, the search for witnesses proved most difficult of all. It was abundantly clear this meeting would require the assistance of translators in order for the staff as well as other outside participants to communicate and involve themselves in this meeting with the witnesses that were found. Other problems encountered during the preparation stages included the non-availability of electric power during the days, lack of a conventional telephone system and a lack of adequate lodging.

Entitled *Excision, From the Rite of Passage to the Passage of Rights*, this public meeting was without a doubt a great success. It allowed the deputies to define the dimensions of the social

phenomenon, which is excision. The estimate 120 participants included at least a dozen deputies and notable guests from Cotonou, such as HAOUA Riley of the U.S. Embassy who represented Her Excellency Pamela BRIDGEWATER, U.S. Ambassador to Benin, as well as Bernard BERGERON and Robert TCALIAN of the French Embassy.

Production of Documentary Films – The Grand Popo Workshop and Public Meetings

In an effort to bring the Benin Parliament into closer contact with the Benin public, the Benin Legislative Project recorded the entire sessions of the workshops and meetings. This would prove to be a first in the history of Benin democracy. It displayed another side of the National Assembly to the Benin population.

Visit Made by the Benin Legislative Project Director to the President of the National Assembly

Although planned since the third quarter of the Project (September-November 2000), a meeting between the BLP Director and the President of the National Assembly did not take place until September 5, 2001. During this meeting the President suggested the BLP Director should send a letter asking the President to mention the priorities of the Project during the October session of parliament. As requested, the letter was sent on October 1, 2001, but never received a reply

Remaining Activities to be Materialized

As previously mentioned, several activities, namely priorities 7, 8 and 10, never materialized. By the end of the quarter they were still in the preparation phase. One activity in particular that was planned, but never carried through, was priority 4, *Setting Up a Unit for the Research and Writing of Texts of Law Within the National Assembly*. It was scheduled for August 6 – 10, 2001, but the contacts made by the BLP Director did not produce the expected results.

Final Quarter

After the seventh quarter report was submitted, no further activities took place nor were there any other reports submitted by the Benin Legislative Project. As with all the quarterly reports, this seventh quarter report was extremely late, not to mention it was not sent to the home office by the Director. As a way of helping the home office to understand the problems the BLP office was experiencing, and to obtain assistance with delinquent reports, SUNY sent a consultant, Mr. Michael Brown, to Benin to work with the in-country team. Please keep in mind this was not the first time SUNY would schedule consultants to travel to Benin to assess the project. Unfortunately, each time we were met with skepticism and obstacles. On several occasions the BLP Director was in the States or he stated he would not be available due to other travel schedules. Mr. Brown was in Benin from January 12 – 19, 2002. Upon his return, he submitted the 7th Quarter report to the SUNY home office. As with all the reports submitted by the BLP Director, this one was in French, although he was instructed he should also provide them in English to avoid translation delays. Because the report required translation, it was not submitted until for another three weeks after the Project Director, Ms. Toby Cole, first received it from the consultant.

PROBLEMS

Program Management

From the beginning this project encountered difficulties with in-country office management. The Chief of Party (COP), Mr. Kango Lare-Lantone, was unwilling to follow the rules and regulations set in place by the SUNY Research Foundation and USAID. Despite repeated warnings, the quarterly reports were never submitted in a timely manner. The home office Project Director, Toby Cole, submitted the first quarterly report but it was based solely on her startup travel to Benin. Mr. Lare-Lantone did not feel writing reports to be part of his job. However, he also refused to communicate with the home office and provide information so that they could at least prepare the reports. Between December 31, 2000 and February 28, 2001 the Project COP was in the U.S. for a total of four weeks. His first week was for personal R&R travel, however, the following three weeks were due to problems with his working papers. Keep in mind this issue was never mentioned or discussed with the home office until he was unable to board a plane for his return to Benin. Eventually the Director was able to resolve the matter and return to the Project. It was during these two visits the problems of the quarterly reports were discussed with Mr. Lare-Lantone, and he stated he could not do anything until he returned to Benin, never mind the fact he was already delinquent on three reports.

Mr. Lare-Lantone continually complained throughout the two years that project management was not part of his duties. However, he never relinquished any of the power or authority to his staff members who were there to assist with the daily management of the project.

Mr. Lare-Lantone met with the Project Director, Ms. Cole, and SUNY management in the U.S. on several occasions wherein the importance of the project management was discussed. It was made clear to him his responsibilities as the COP and his obligations to both SUNY Research Foundation and USAID. He agreed that he would cooperate and carryout out his job functions, however, each time he would return to Benin and do the opposite.

Financial Management

From the beginning the project suffered a major setback because the COP did not have an accountant. The Project would be in existence for 6 months before it was fully staffed. During that time the COP was unable and unwilling to provide proper documentation so the home office could assist with the project accounting. He repeatedly stated, "the bank does not provide statements", and refused to send them. To this date, the home office only received emails of the monthly account from ECOBANK. After receiving the initial startup funds of \$45,000, the COP waited three months before sending any receipts to the home office accounting for the money he had spent. This would create a lag in the process of wiring money to the Project that would continue until the end.

Instead of obtaining a proper lease for his residence, the COP only provided the home office with a receipt showing he had paid his rent for one full year.

The COP and the staff would continually send their monthly reconciliations to the home office with insufficient receipts, and created a hostile communication environment when the home office would try to resolve the financial problems. On many occasions, our questions were simply unanswered.

SUNY had a financial obligation to manage this project within the guidelines of government regulations. We were not at liberty to release money without proper documentation.

Not without fault, SUNY/CID and the Research Foundation acknowledges and accepts responsibility for any problems it caused or for its contributions to the slow and inadequate flow of money to the project. Because of the problems with this project and several others, SUNY has switched to a new administrative office that is completely devoted to the timely, efficient management of its projects.

Project Closeout

The COP continually placed roadblocks in the way so as to slow down the closeout process. He refused to turn over the bankbook until the last day that he thought Ms. Toby Cole and her colleague, Ms. Laurie Henry, were expected to leave. When he did send it to the hotel, there were stub receipts missing, which do not allow us to accurately account for checks that were previously written. Also he made it difficult for his staff to turn over receipts and remaining invoices that should have been paid. Upon Toby and Laurie's arrival in Benin, Mr. Lare-Lantone and his staff would not give Toby and Laurie the account reconciliations and receipts so they could properly assess what bills were left unpaid, which would allow them to obtain the proper amount of funds still needed before final closeout of the office and bank account.

Before arriving in Benin, Ms. Cole phoned and sent emails to Mr. Lare-Lantone and his staff instructing them of the necessary steps to set in motion in order to proceed with Project closeout. It was made clear to Ms. Cole that nothing would take place and no actions would occur until she arrived in Benin. Because of this delay, Mr. Lare-Lantone did not properly cancel the office lease, which caused us to pay an extra three months rent to the landlord. Mr. Lare-Lantone then set up a bogus meeting with the landlord, Ms. Cole and Ms. Henry although he knew he had never made any prior arrangements. Not to mention, it was brought to our attention during the final week that the property was being leased by a member of the National Assembly.

Although the Project had a vehicle that was purchased for "Project Use", Mr. Lare-Lantone felt the vehicle was his personal property. It was available to Toby and Laurie at his convenience. Taxi service to Porto-Novo is not one of great luxury or abundant availability. This was a major problem on days Mr. Lare-Lantone decided he would not come to the office.

During the second week that Ms. Cole and Ms. Henry were in Benin, it was necessary for SUNY to terminate Mr. Lare-Lantone's contract. He was consistently insubordinate and performing unprofessionally, which caused major problems for Ms. Cole and Ms. Henry, as well as his own staff.

CONCLUSION

From the beginning the Benin National Assembly Strengthening Project was seen as a great opportunity to work with the National Assembly and assist in developing a strong legislative community. SUNY Center for International Development (SUNY/CID) was already familiar with the members and staff of the National Assembly as well as with the context and environment of Benin. Having worked with the National Assembly of Benin on two occasions during the previous three years prior to this project, SUNY/CID established a good working relationship. Their needs assessment work in 1998 produced documents outlining options, alternatives, and recommendations for strengthening the institution. This allowed for a rapid startup, which was critical to the success of a short, two-year legislative strengthening project.

Unfortunately, being plagued from the beginning with a COP who was not qualified to manage the program nor willing to be a team player made it impossible to achieve the Project's objectives.