



# INTERNATIONAL NGOS FACING THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BENIN. THE EXAMPLE OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (1991-2011)

Arnaud Achille Gbènassou GNIDEHOUE

[gachilleg@yahoo.fr](mailto:gachilleg@yahoo.fr)

*Université d'Abomey-Calavi (UAC)/ Bénin*

## ABSTRACT

Every human being has rights and duties inherent to their nature. Since the end of the Second World War, fundamental human freedoms have been recognized through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In Benin, the question of the promotion of fundamental freedoms is slow to be addressed at the level of those in power and human rights have been regularly violated since the 1990s, despite the proclamation of the rule of law at the Conference of Living Forces of February 1990. It is through these acts of violation that the actions of NGOs working to promote and protect human rights take on their full meaning. This study, therefore, aims to evaluate the contribution of Amnesty International Benin to the promotion, respect, and defence of human rights in Benin since 1991, the year of the creation of an Amnesty International section in Benin (AIB). To this end, what is the contribution of AIB in the promotion and respect of fundamental freedoms in Benin from 1991 to 2011? In view of this central question, our methodology consisted of questioning the existing written documentation on the subject. Some testimonies were collected in the field from some members of this NGO and some beneficiaries of its programs. The analysis of data from these different sources made it possible to construct a historical discourse around three essential axes.

**Keywords:** Benin; international NGO; human rights; rule of law; Amnesty International

## RESUME

Tout être humain a des droits et des devoirs inhérents à sa nature. Depuis la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, les libertés fondamentales de l'homme sont reconnues à travers la Déclaration Universelle des droits de l'Homme. Au Bénin, la question de la promotion des libertés fondamentales tarde à prendre au niveau des gouvernants et les droits de l'homme sont régulièrement violés depuis les années 1990, en dépit de la proclamation de l'Etat de droit à la Conférence des forces vives de février 1990. C'est à travers ces actes de violation que les actions des ONG œuvrant dans le sens de la promotion et la protection des droits humains, prennent tout leur sens. Cette étude se propose alors d'évaluer la contribution de Amnesty International Bénin à la promotion, au respect et à la défense des droits humains au Bénin depuis 1991, année de la création d'une section Amnesty International au Bénin (AIB). A cet effet, quelle est la contribution de AIB dans la promotion et le respect des libertés fondamentales au Bénin de 1991 à 2011 ? Au vu de cette question centrale, notre méthodologie a consisté à interroger la documentation écrite existante sur le sujet. Aussi, certains témoignages ont été recueillis de quelques membres de cette ONG et quelques bénéficiaires de ses programmes. L'analyse des données issues de ces différentes sources a permis de construire un discours historique autour de trois axes essentiels.

**Mots-clés :** Bénin ; ONG internationale ; droits humains ; état de droit ; Amnesty International

## INTRODUCTION

It is revealed that human beings have fundamental rights and freedoms inherent in their nature. These are, among others, the right to life, to security, to a nationality, on the one hand, and freedom of thought, to communicate, of religion, of assembly and of association on the other hand. These rights have been recognized since the end of the Second World War through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus, according to Happer (2008, p.25): "All governments, without exception, must guarantee their citizens sound governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights"<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, these fundamental rights and freedoms are constantly, consciously or unconsciously violated, especially in poor African countries. In Benin, the question of the promotion of fundamental freedoms is slow to be addressed at the level of those in power and human rights have been regularly violated since the 1990s, despite the proclamation of the rule of law at the Conference of Living Forces of February 1990. It is through these acts of violation that the actions of NGOs working to promote and protect human rights take on their full meaning. Among these NGOs, we have chosen through this study to reflect on the case of Amnesty International.

Independent of any State, any economic power, any political ideology that intervenes on behalf of victims of human rights violations based on impartial research and international law. She does not support or fight any regime or political system, nor does she necessarily share the conviction of the victims she is trying to defend (1991, p.1).

Information posted on the NGO's website also shows that it is a global association bringing together more than seven million people who act to ensure that the fundamental rights of each individual are respected. Its vision is that of a world where everyone can enjoy all the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other international texts relating to human rights<sup>2</sup>.

This study therefore aims to evaluate the contribution of Amnesty International Benin to the promotion, respect and defence of human rights since 1991, the year of the creation of an Amnesty International section in Benin (AIB). To this end, what is the contribution of AIB in the promotion and respect of fundamental freedoms in Benin from 1991 to 2011, the year when Benin, marked by bans on television broadcasts, the publication of newspapers, marches and meetings unions and political parties, arrests, police custody, threats of all kinds, arbitrary arrests of journalists, has completely regressed in the reports presented by international bodies regarding respect and promotion of human rights<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Declaration at the UN-sponsored International Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 2008. Confer [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org) consulted on 10 march 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Confer [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org) consulted on 10 march 2023.

<sup>3</sup> <sup>3</sup>The annual reports of Reporters Sans Frontières and Amnesty International speak volumes

To this end, what is the contribution of AIB in the promotion and respect of fundamental freedoms in Benin from 1991 to 2011? The answer to this central question allowed us to show that this international NGO has been working since 1991 in Benin for the promotion and defence of human rights, especially through actions of denunciation, training and awareness. Our methodology consisted of searching the existing written documentation on the subject. We were also able to collect some testimonies from members of this NGO and some beneficiaries of its programs in the field. The cross-analysis of data from these different sources made it possible to construct a historical discourse around three essential axes that are (i) Promotion and defence of fundamental freedoms by AIB; (ii) AIB in the field of human rights since 2000; (iii) Impact of AIB's Actions and the challenges to be met by the NGO.

### **1. Promotion and defence of fundamental liberties by Amnesty International Bénin (AIB)**

Amnesty International is an NGO born in England in 1961. It was established in Benin in 1991, thanks to the Democratic Renewal. The photo below shows the logo of the Beninese section of Amnesty International.



Figure 1: logo of AI Bénin

Source: [www.amnestybenin.org](http://www.amnestybenin.org)

According to the 2<sup>nd</sup> article of its Statutes cited by Houindo (2015, p.12):

Amnesty International Benin's mission is to publicize, prevent, and put an end to serious attacks on rights and physical and mental integrity, freedom of opinion and expression and the rights not to be victims of discrimination.

#### ***1.1. Amnesty International Benin's areas of action***

Amnesty International Benin's areas of action are numerous. These are all included on the NGO's list of priorities internationally. These are priorities which, according to Ms. Martins Elingui, "are recorded in the integrated strategic plan which is the result of an annual consultation of all the national sections of the association"<sup>4</sup>. Thus, AIB's

---

<sup>4</sup> Josiane Martins Elingui, National Manager, Cotonou, 01 April 2003.

areas of intervention are: campaigns for the abolition of the death penalty, the fight against the arms trade, human rights education, a campaign to fight for the dignity of people in situations of poverty called "Let's Demand Dignity" (Houindo, 2015, p.33). Apart from these actions of great historical significance which require the mobilization of external resources, AIB works for the promotion of maternal health, sexual and reproductive rights especially of young girls, which are local actions (Houindo, *ibid.*).

The international NGO touches these areas thanks to a rigorous working method adopted in all affiliated countries. These include denunciation, days of reflection, campaigns and awareness sessions. Indeed, denunciation consists of carrying out careful investigations into one or more human rights violations and producing the results in a report which is popularized. Often, these denunciations follow observations made by activists and sympathizers or "Investigators"<sup>5</sup> of the NGO spread throughout the national territory. For example, the AAA coordinator points out that after several complaints about cases of violation of prisoners' rights, AI Benin dispatched a mission to Benin's prisons to observe these cases of abuse in July 2008 and September 2009<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, AI Benin's reflection days are for the most part grafted onto international days. We can give as an example the International Human Rights Day celebrated on December 10 each year. As for awareness campaigns and sessions, they make it possible to popularize results or keep a target informed about a legal situation. For example, forced marriages, the right to share inheritances.

The means available to AI Benin to achieve these objectives are those available to the association internationally. These are pleas, petitions and lobbying<sup>7</sup>. However, AI Benin would not have been able to easily operate in Benin if the conditions in the country were not favourable to it.

### *1.2. Favourable factors for Amnesty International's action in Benin*

Three fundamental factors have been identified in the expression of the success of Amnesty International's actions in Benin. First, there is the constitution of December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1990, which has established the rooting of democratic values in the country followed by the National Conference of Living Forces, thus breaking with 17 years of a liberticidal regime. Moreover, the first commission installed for the socio-political recovery of the country during the National Conference was "the commission on

---

<sup>5</sup> Investigators' are agents hired by AIB to verify a violation following a series of complaints

<sup>6</sup> Josiane Martins Elingui, national manager, Cotonou, 01 april 2003.

<sup>7</sup> All the contacts and authors we consulted were unanimous on this point.

laws, promotion and protection of human rights” (Adamon, 1995, p.116). Also, Constitutional Law No. 90-022 of August 2, 1990 organizing the powers of the transitional period, already affirmed in its preamble: "the determination of the Beninese people to create a State of law in which the fundamental rights of the 'man, public freedoms, the dignity of the human person and justice will be guaranteed' (1990, p.147). From now on, the Beninese people express their attachment to the values contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. This roots the values of law and freedom in the country.

Then, the country's political and economic system was a breeding ground for freedom of expression and business. Indeed, since the National Conference, the country has opted for democracy with economic liberalism as the basis of development. Such a new political and economic vision is a favourable ground for the promotion and respect of human rights to flourish in a country which has just broken with approximately two decades of autocratic regime where human rights were violated with impunity<sup>8</sup>. Henceforth, in Benin, democratic principles allow the development of the population pushed for seventeen years to its limits by the military dictatorship.

Finally, with the commitment of Western states to support democratic Benin with the aim of

better respond to the expectations of the Beninese people loving freedom and justice at the end of the great night of denial of human rights inflicted on them by the PRPB regime, the perception of the 1990 constituent was to now bring Beninese standards in terms of human rights and those of international legal standards on the one hand, then base its work on those with a regional vocation, on the other hand (Mahouna, 2007, p.27).

Thus, Benin is committed to respecting international texts such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, as well as the various international Covenants and Conventions. The ratification of these texts is, according to F.C. Mahouna, “the expression of the will of the Beninese people to develop and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (2007, p.28). The aim being the social and economic well-being of the grassroots populations. These various factors favourable to AIB's actions have enabled it to invest in a number of areas by carrying out varied actions.

## **2. Amnesty International on the human rights field in Benin since the beginning of 2000**

Since its creation in 1991, the NGO first worked to establish its structures and branches throughout the country before resolutely getting to work in the early 2000s.

---

<sup>8</sup> This was the military-Marxist regime that prevailed in Benin from 1972 to 1989 under the leadership of General Mathieu Kérékou..

Several types of actions in different areas are to its credit. In this study, emphasis has been laid on actions and projects to popularize human rights and duties through information campaigns, various school programs, and audiences with decision-makers.

### *2.1. Awareness campaigns*

Amnesty International Benin takes advantage of the celebration of international days relating to freedoms and human rights to organize awareness campaigns or workshops for a targeted segment of the population. In this area, examples overflow. Indeed, taking advantage of March 8<sup>th</sup><sup>9</sup> each year, the NGO organizes an awareness campaign for women on a specific theme. In 2004, for example, women from the different subsections of AI Benin were invited to an awareness and information workshop on the gender approach (AIB, 2004, p.5). On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010, AI Benin has organized training for leaders of women's groups in the main markets of towns with special status in the country<sup>10</sup> on the basic notions of accounting. These responsible women must then relay these notions to the grassroots in their respective groups (AIB, 2010, p.9). In 2011, it was through an awareness session for young girls that the NGO organized Women's Day. The theme of the day being: "Sexual and reproductive rights and the fight against HIV/AIDS and sexual harassment in schools". The sites chosen were CEG 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Lokossa in the Mono department<sup>11</sup> and CEG Djègan-kpèvi in the commune of Porto-Novo, Ouémé department<sup>12</sup> (AIB, 2011, p.6).

Apart from women's days, AIB highlights the situation of refugees. Thus, on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007 for example, in collaboration with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Benin, under the theme "voiceless refugee children", the Children's Clubs program was filmed and broadcast by the national television with the effective participation of around a hundred refugee children who carried poignant messages to the country's public decision-makers and the international community (AIB, 2007, p.94). This action has been punctuated by a day of awareness raising for schoolchildren in several primary schools<sup>13</sup> in the country, on the behaviour they should have towards their foreign classmates. Furthermore, the Beninese section of Amnesty International, with the aim of strengthening the capacities of its members who are its arms acting in the field of human rights, organizes capacity-building workshops for them annually. The 2011's session has

---

<sup>9</sup> 08 March is International Women's Day.

<sup>10</sup> The towns of Parakou, Calavi, Cotonou and Porto-Novo.

<sup>11</sup> South-west of the country.

<sup>12</sup> South-east of the country.

<sup>13</sup> Schools located in refugee areas.

brought together activists from the north and center in Bassila<sup>14</sup> on July 31<sup>st</sup>, and activists from the south of the country on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, in Lokossa<sup>15</sup>. All these awareness-raising activities aim, according to Ms. J. Martins Elingui: “to contribute not only to a better knowledge of AIB but above all to the promotion of recognized rights inherent to the human person”<sup>16</sup>.

Apart from awareness-raising activities, AIB initiates training and information actions.

## *2.2. Training and information programs*

Training and information programs allow the population to understand their rights and the right channels to claim them, when they are violated. These training programs have above all enabled the Beninese section of Amnesty International to initiate actions aimed at schools and universities, towards workers and disadvantaged sections of society.

Indeed, since 2001, AIB has installed junior sections of Amnesty International in high schools and colleges across the country for the membership and training of new members among the pupils and learners. The objectives of this action are, on the one hand, to enable young people to be imbued with the culture of human rights and duties and to promote them and, on the other hand, to train the next generation. Our field investigations revealed that already in 2011, all public universities in Benin had their Amnesty<sup>17</sup> section. In addition, several high schools and secondary schools across the country also had sections that held their meetings regularly. As proof, we only have the Lycée Béhanzin in Porto-Novo, the CEG Sainte Rita and Gbégamey in Cotonou, the CEG I Abomey-Calavi, and the Mathieu Bouké high school in Parakou. In collaboration with the national headquarters, these different sections organize training activities for members and information for the general public. This includes, for example, the “Children’s Parliament” project, to enable young people aged 10 to 18 to develop leadership in human rights matters. Conferences for the general public are also organized in universities by student members of Amnesty International.

Thus, on Valentine's Day in 2010, the conference organized by the university students in Abomey-Calavi was on the theme: Engagement and marriage in the code of persons and the family in Benin. The same year, the Amnesty section of the High Teacher Training College of Education, Ecole Normale Supérieure of Porto-Novo, organized a conference debate whose theme was: The dropping out of school of girls in the communes of the Ouémé valley: causes, consequences and attempts at

---

<sup>14</sup> A town in the centre of the country, about 300 km from Cotonou.

<sup>15</sup> Located in the south-west of the country, about 200 km from Cotonou.

<sup>16</sup> Josiane Martins Elingui, *op cit*.

<sup>17</sup> We conducted this survey in the country's two largest public universities: the University of Abomey-Calavi and the University of Parakou.

solutions. The place which served as the framework for this activity is the CEG of Gbada<sup>18</sup>.

In addition, AIB has invested on several occasions, alongside out-of-school groups such as apprentice workers, refreshment-bar, waitresses, and motorcycle taxi drivers (Zémidjan). It has set up, for this sometimes-marginalized population, training programs linked to their rights and duties; in the management of his affairs, to guarantee him autonomy. Two examples in this area caught our attention. This is the "Zémidjan, vector of peace" project for motorcycle taxis during the campaign for the 2011 presidential elections. This project was executed across the entire national territory before the first round of voting (AIB, 2012, p.14). The second example in this section is that relating to the training of young apprentice workers (masonry, carpenters, painters, tilers, etc.) on the limits of the boss's authority, their rights and duties. This project, initiated and carried out since 2008 in partnership with the Conrad Adenauer Foundation, the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs, has a spectacular audience among the targeted cohort (AIB, 2010, p.15).

The same year and on another aspect, AIB undertook the experimental phase of the "Serveuses et Dignes" project. This project, designed in collaboration with the national police, the Ministries of Justice and Family Affairs and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, aims, according to divisional commissioner H. Azonhè: "to inform girl waitresses in refreshment-bars, maquis and bars on their rights and duties in the exercise of their profession"<sup>19</sup>. The experimental phase in Cotonou involved a sample of fifty young girl servers in 10 refreshment-bars<sup>20</sup>. For this experimental phase, the organizers concluded that the results are very edifying. Furthermore, communication through posters is another form of information action that AIB uses. These posters or posters placed in busy places in the country's major cities carry messages of commitment to the population. It is also the least expensive and easiest communication strategy to implement. Apart from training and information, and faced with the persistent problems of violation and ignorance of human rights, AI Benin intervenes directly with decision-makers at various levels.

### **2.3. 2.3 Audiences with decision-makers**

This involves lobbying political and administrative authorities, opinion leaders, NGO leaders and sometimes donors, to win a case or to send a message. AIB uses this pressure strategy to get the country's authorities to make judicious decisions for the respect and protection of human rights in the face of cases of violation. For

---

<sup>18</sup> This activity was organised as part of the CEG's recreational days, from 06 to 08 June.

<sup>19</sup> Interview on 03 April 2023 in Cotonou.

<sup>20</sup> Ten highly influential bars identified in the city of Cotonou.

example, faced with the inhumane conditions of prisoners in Benin's prisons observed in 2010, the report presented by the international NGO to the country's political authorities is alarming: "overcrowding, deplorable living conditions, food without quality and quantity, precarious security situation of detainees" (A.A.G. Gnidehou, 2022, p. 160-161). This report required a visit by the Mediator of the Republic in 2011 to the country's incarcerate centers to observe the situation. A few weeks later, the consequence of this visit by the Mediator was a significant improvement in these centers. Indeed, according to Mr. P. Massalokonon: "the daily food ration was increased to two hot meals per day with a significant improvement in both quantity and quality"<sup>21</sup>. However, already on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007, aware that respect for human rights must be a reality for all, whatever the social conditions and given the conditions of detention of prisoners in Benin, AIB had requested and obtained the ratification of an agreement with the Danish Development Agency (DANIDA) to raise awareness among guards and judicial officers about the rights of detainees and magistrates about their detention situation.

A few years earlier, already in May 2006, when the new President of the Republic, Mr. Thomas Boni Yayi, took power, Amnesty International Benin had begun "pressuring public decision-makers in favour of the abolition of the death penalty in Benin"<sup>22</sup>. At the end of many negotiations with the various successive Ministers of Justice and the President of the National Assembly, Professor Mathurin Coffi Nago, it was not until 2011, that is to say five years afterwards, affirms L. Dossou, that "the optional protocol abolishing the death penalty was adopted by the National Assembly under pressure from Amnesty National Benin"<sup>23</sup>. This victory of the NGO had a resounding echo even at the national and international level. Still in the same section, AIB's pressure on the Mediator of the Republic, the Presidents of the High Court of Justice and the Constitutional Court, enabled the release of the five journalists condemned in 2011 for defamatory remarks during the election campaign of the Presidential elections<sup>24</sup>. The same pressure made it possible to decriminalize the three press organs which attempted to publish the main trends in the results before the official proclamation of the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (CENA)<sup>25</sup>. Several other examples justify AIB's lobbying of Benin's political decision-

---

<sup>21</sup> Former manager of Cotonou prison, interview on 12 December 2021 in Cotonou.

<sup>22</sup> Josiane Martins Elingui, Head of National Office, Cotonou, 01 April 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Dossou Lucien, Coordinator in charge fundraising at national headquarters. Interview on 30 January 2023 in Cotonou

<sup>24</sup> The 2011 presidential elections marked the second five-year term of President Tomas Boni Yayi. They were a high-risk affair, profoundly affecting the peace of mind of the civilian population, with a trail of bullying and human rights violations, especially among members of the media.

<sup>25</sup> Dossou Lucien, *op cit*.

makers for peace and respect for human rights in the country. AIB's actions in this last section are numerous and justify the operation of the NGO in Benin. They have impacted the political and economic life of the country despite the numerous challenges faced by the Beninese section of the international NGO in a country where human rights, to a large extent, continue to be a quest.

### **3. Impact of AIB's Actions and the challenges faced by the NGO**

In the form of a discussion, this part of our study takes into account two aspects. This concerns the impact of the actions of Amnesty International Benin in awakening popular awareness and the analysis of the challenges to be taken up by this NGO in Benin to fully achieve its objectives.

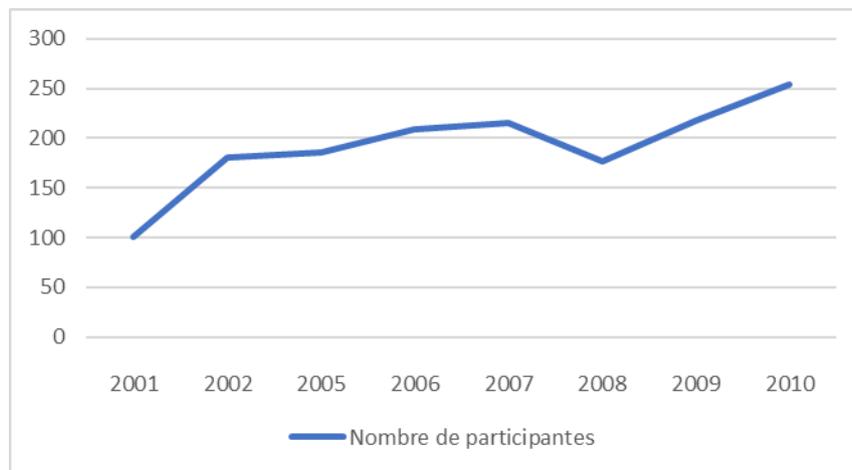
#### ***3.1. Impact of AI Benin's actions in awakening popular consciousness***

Through its awareness-raising, lobbying and training initiatives, AI Benin was able to raise the message of human rights in Benin. The organization promotes and popularizes human rights through different channels among the most disadvantaged populations. The impact of its actions can be assessed on several levels.

Indeed, through radio broadcasts, newsletters, training programs, AI Benin has demystified the notion of human rights and made it accessible to all: it is the promotion of human rights. Through various channels such as rural radios (which broadcast programs in local languages) and the local sections of Amnesty (which act as relays), the international NGO has brought the concept of human rights closer to its target. . Fundamental texts related to rights are translated into national languages for adults, and put in the form of comic strips for younger children. Several consequences arise from this effort to promote human rights by AI Benin. This is the increase in the number of Amnesty sections in high schools, secondary schools, and universities across the country. These different sessions constitute the framework for disseminating messages of rights, duties, and culture of peace to young people, future leaders of the country, not only, but also they make it possible to measure the audience of the different sessions information for adults. For example, the data collected about the training and information meetings organized annually by AIB on March 8<sup>th</sup> for women from different regions of Benin, show the particular interest that the latter place in the NGO. The statistics that we have collected in the various reports of March 8<sup>th</sup> organized by AI Bénin<sup>26</sup> allow us to draw the curve below.

---

<sup>26</sup> See the Reports at the headquarters of the international NGO in Cotonou.



**Figure 2** : Evolution of participants  
Source: Activity Report of March 8<sup>th</sup>.

The curve shows an upward trend. This development reflects, through the number of participants in the events from 2001 to 2010, the interest of market women and women's associations in the annual training, information and awareness sessions that AIB organizes for them. In addition to the absence of data for 2003 and 2004 due to the absence of figures for these years, the drop observed in 2008 is linked to the coincidence between the AIB demonstrations and the information session organized this year, on the same date, towards the same target, by the Ministry responsible for Microcredit Alafia. Furthermore, women who have benefited from the various actions of this NGO in the direction of training in the concept of law, sometimes testify to this with a note of exaggeration. In this regard, Mrs. J. Dogué claims that:

No one can bully me anymore. I was told who to contact when I have problems. Even at home, we are protected and our husbands know it. We also know how to manage our business so it thrives<sup>27</sup>.

The president of the women producing gari<sup>28</sup> in the Ouémé valley herself was full of praise for Amnesty Benin: "... we warmly greet them. They teach us how to fish instead of giving us fish like politicians do. I will never forget that"<sup>29</sup>. The notions of human rights are now within everyone's reach, thus giving reason to the conception according to which: "The best way to defend human rights is to work for their better knowledge" (Houindo, 2015, p.51).

---

<sup>27</sup> Mrs Jeannette Dogué is a member of a women's palm oil cooperative in the Ouémé valley, interview on 10/01/2023 in Adjohoun (Ouémé valley).

<sup>28</sup> An edible flour made mainly from cassava, much appreciated in southern Benin.

<sup>29</sup> Mrs Loko Dossi, president of the association of women gari producers, interview on 10/01/2023 in Adjohoun (Ouémé valley).

Apart from the promotion of human rights, the impact of AI Benin's actions can also be appreciated through the various projects developed with the NGO's partners. Among these, we include the DANIDA project, initiated by AI Benin with the support of the Danish Development Agency (DANIDA) and co-piloted by three other civil society organizations, namely: Action des Chrétiens pour the Abolition of Torture; Social Dimension Benin; Organization for the defence of the interests of prisoners. Since its implementation, it has led to a notable improvement in detention conditions in Benin's incarcerate centers. In addition to the conditions of detention, DANIDA has enabled, thanks to the active involvement of the Mediator of the Republic, Mr. Albert Tévoédjrè, "the decongestion of the prisons of Cotonou, Porto-Novo, and Abomey-Calavi, because most of the detainees would be in pre-trial detention or prolonged detention without trial" (Houindo, 2015, p.49). The DANIDA project made it possible to update the situation of more than 600 detainees whose detention situations were unclear<sup>30</sup>.

Overall, the commitment of AI Benin, supported by government organizations and civil society, to defend human rights made it possible to achieve satisfactory results. However, much remains to be done.

### ***3.2. And yet there are many challenges to overcome!***

AI Benin is plagued by difficulties which are slowing down the momentum of the various sections in the fight against attacks on human rights and freedoms, despite the will and determination of the members.

Indeed, one of the major difficulties facing the Beninese section of the international NGO is the insufficient number of members to implement actions. This problem is mainly linked to the principle of volunteering which is very poorly accepted in a poor country like Benin where the culture of voluntary activism has not yet become a habit. Volunteering creates a lack of motivation in the member, directly leading to unavailability. Added to this major challenge is that of leadership between those responsible at the national level of the NGO. This question of leadership led to lethargy in the actions of AI Benin between 2008 and 2013 according to the members. Barrister Toko and Mr. N Idohou Arokoho cited by Houindo (2015, p.56) believe that it is: "personal quarrels and ego issues between managers at various levels" .

Furthermore, the other difficulty, which seriously disrupts the actions of AI Benin, pertains to the search for funds necessary for the execution of the actions. The Beninese section of Amnesty International is regularly confronted with a lack of

---

<sup>30</sup> See archives of the national executive secretariat.

financial and logistical resources in achieving its objectives. This problem, known everywhere, constitutes a serious handicap for the NGO section.

These major difficulties noted above slow down the momentum of the movement and sometimes prevent certain actions that could have had a positive impact on the grassroots populations.

## CONCLUSION

Recognized and proclaimed as an international value following the Second World War under the leadership of the UN, human rights now occupy a prominent place in the various fundamental texts of the countries of the world in general and those of Africa in particular including Benin. Nevertheless, these loudly proclaimed human rights are insufficiently promoted and constantly violated in Benin. It is with this observation that the work of Amnesty International Benin takes on its full meaning. Local section of the international NGO promoting human rights among vulnerable populations, AI Benin carried out from 1991 to 2011, countless actions within the framework of the protection of human values among the Beninese populations. However, internal and external difficulties sometimes disrupt its proper functioning. Faced with the latter, it becomes imperative to provide appropriate solutions to further impact populations whose ignorance of their rights hinders the fulfilment and therefore the development of the country.

**Table 1:** Selective list of informants

Full Name	Social status	Interview dates
MASSALOKONON Parfait	Former warden of the Cotonou prison	12/12/2022 at Cotonou
MARTINS ELINGUI Josiane	National Coordinator	01/04/2023 at Cotonou
DOGUE Jeannette	Gari producer	10/01/2023 at Adjohoun (vallée de l'Ouémé)
DOSSOU Lucien	National coordinator of fundraising	30/01/2023 at Cotonou
LOKO Dossi	President of women producers of Gari	10/01/2023 at Adjohoun (Vallée de l'Ouémé)
AZONHE G. Hermann	Police Commissioner, Deputy Coordinator of the SD project	03/04/2023 at Cotonou

## References

Adamon, A. (1995). *Le Renouveau Démocratique au Bénin, la Conférence Nationale des Forces Vives et la période de Transition*, Paris, l'Harmattan, Collection « points de vue concrets ».

- AIB (2004). *Lueur d'Espoir*, Bulletin d'Information et d'Education aux Droits Humains, Cotonou, IT, n°6, janvier-mars.
- AIB (2010). *Lueur d'Espoir*, Bulletin d'Information et d'Education aux Droits Humains, Cotonou, IT, n°13, mars.
- AIB (2012). *Lueur d'Espoir*, Bulletin d'Information et d'Education aux Droits Humains, Cotonou, IT, n°24, mars.
- Amnesty International (1992). « Rapport annuel 1991 », édition francophone.
- Amnesty International Bénin (1991). *Présentation d'Amnesty International*, Cotonou.
- Amnesty International Bénin (2007). « Rapport annuel 2007 ».
- Gnidehou, A. A. (2022). « Le contrôle social au Bénin : la modernisation de la prison civile de Cotonou (1952-2012) » in *Revue de la Société Camerounaise d'Histoire (RSCH)*, n°1, décembre 2022.
- Mahouna, F. C. (2007). *Justice constitutionnelle et droits de l'homme au Bénin*, Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Chair UNESCO des droits de la personne humaine, FADESP, mémoire de DEA en Droit.
- République du Bénin (1990). *Loi Constitutionnelle n°90-022*, in Nauhmann Friedrich (dir.), *Les Actes de la Conférence Nationale : Cotonou du 19 au 28 février 1990*, Cotonou, ONEPI.

[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)