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Rural Drinking Water Supply in Benin, West Africa

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Abstract

Benin, located in a transition zone between the wet and dry tropics of West-Africa, is suffering from temporal and spatial difficulties in drinking water supply. Although the total amount of renewable water resources per capita and year accounts for 3954 m³ (UNO 2003), there are places and times in Benin, where and when rural women have to spend up to 10 hours a day to fetch water for their household members.

Water stress situations in Benin are due to temporal and spatial variability of rainfall, geo-hydrological conditions and missing financial means to afford modern technical supply facilities. Such equipment, like boreholes with handpumps, are reliable and applicable water supply facilities for rural areas of Benin. The drilling depth of boreholes is deeper than this of excavated wells and usually reaches the groundwater table even in dry seasons. Another advantage of boreholes with handpumps are hygienic conditions, because they are sealed, so that pollution of water resources is naturally less likely to occur than with open water resources.

The disadvantage of boreholes with handpumps is that they are more cost-intensive than other drinking water facilities, like wells for example, and that they require maintenance and repair work. The result of an investigation, conducted in 34 villages in North Benin (January-April 2003), shows, that 32 % of the inhabitants have access to improved water supply facilities (boreholes with handpumps or excavated modern wells), but only 12 % of the inhabitants have access to improved water supply facilities, which are functioning all the year.

An intensification of maintenance skills of the concerned population and better access to spare parts should improve the reliability of drinking water facilities in rural Benin.

Keywords: Benin, drinking water, rural water supply, West Africa