

# From Plans to Budgets: Driving Food Security and Nutrition Accountability in Benin's Local Government

*SISAN – A scoring tool developed by Benin's municipalities is now used across all 77 communes of the country to check whether local plans and budgets address hunger and malnutrition.*

## Background

In Benin, 36.5% of children under five are stunted – chronically malnourished to the point where it affects their growth and development ([MICS 2021–22](#)). This exceeds both the West Africa average of 31.3% and WHO's 30% 'very high' public health concern threshold and has risen from 32% in 2017–18. As of November 2025, about 191,000 people were facing crisis-level food insecurity (IPC Phase 3), and 83% of households could not afford a healthy and diverse diet. The situation is worse in the northern part of the country, where screening data generally show higher rates of acute malnutrition and stunting.<sup>1,2</sup>

The challenge in Benin is not the absence of nutrition policy. National commitments exist, and data on malnutrition is available at the national and departmental levels – but not consistently at the commune level where plans and budgets are made. What has been systematically missing is a method for checking whether nutrition commitments are reflected in the local development plans and budgets that direct public spending. Without a clear way to check whether a plan addresses nutrition — or whether the budget funds it — there is no basis for accountability or for tracking whether commitments are met.

CASCADE's<sup>i</sup> response, working with National Association of Communes of Benin (ANCB), was to bring SISAN to scale across the country. In this way, the project supports implementation of Benin's National Food and Nutrition Policy (PNAN) at the commune level, where services are actually delivered. As ANCB's Executive Director Sègla Lihoussou described it: SISAN is «*un instrument d'accélération de l'intégration de la nutrition dans les planifications locales*» — a tool for speeding up the inclusion of nutrition in local plans.<sup>3</sup>



*“Si chaque Commune relevait ce défi, elle aurait accompli cet exploit pour le développement du Bénin.”*  
(“If every commune rose to this challenge, it would have accomplished something remarkable for the development of Bénin.”) — Sègla Lihoussou, Executive Director, ANCB — Dassa-Zoomè, 28 August 2024<sup>3</sup>

<sup>i</sup> CAtalyzing Strengthened policy aCtion for heAlthy Diets and resilienceE (CASCADE), (2022–2027) works to improve food security and reduce malnutrition among women of reproductive age and children across Benin, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Uganda. Funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and implemented by CARE Netherlands, CARE USA, and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), the programme connects people and policy with a food systems approach to promote multi-sectoral coordination, engage the private sector, and strengthen household and community resilience to address structural and gender-related barriers to healthy diets.

## What is SISAN

SISAN – *Score d'Intégration de la Sécurité Alimentaire et Nutritionnelle* (Food and Nutrition Security Integration Score) – assesses three components of a commune's planning documents: its situation analysis (does it diagnose nutrition problems?), its development plan (does it commit to nutrition actions?), and its annual budget (does it allocate funding to them?). Each is scored separately against the four FAO pillars of food and nutrition security. Pillar scores run from 0 to 100 and are plotted on a radar chart, making gaps immediately visible. Budget results are shown as bar charts enabling year-on-year comparison.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1: SISAN's four pillars, what they cover, and what the tool checks**

| Pillar                    | Components                                                                                                                                                                                                               | What SISAN checks                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Availability              | <b>Internal production factors:</b> food production (crops, livestock, fisheries), agricultural inputs, land access and tenure, agricultural water and financing.<br><b>External factors:</b> food aid and food imports. | Are internal production factors (food crops, livestock, fisheries, farming inputs, land access) and external factors (food aid, food imports) included in plans and budgets?                                               |
| Accessibility             | Household income; income diversity; how income is spent on food                                                                                                                                                          | Are measures to raise household income, diversify livelihoods, and improve access to markets included?                                                                                                                     |
| Nutrition/<br>Utilisation | Safe water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH); diet quality; health services                                                                                                                                                 | Are safe water and sanitation, infant and young child feeding, dietary diversity, nutrition of adolescent girls and pregnant/lactating women, food hygiene, school canteens, and treatment of acute malnutrition included? |
| Stability                 | Food storage; crisis response and adaptation; local food security governance; market and road infrastructure                                                                                                             | Are food storage mechanisms, crisis adaptation strategies, the food security institutional framework, and market and road infrastructure included?                                                                         |

Sources: ACAD conceptualisation document, August 2018; SISAN User Guide, May 2025.

## Origins and Development

SISAN was created in 2017–18 by specialists at ACAD – Benin's municipal association for the Atacora and Donga regions. With Belgian support through AMSANA – a nutrition programme that ran in the Atacora until 2020 – it was initially tested in 13 communes across the Atacora and Donga. It builds on earlier national nutrition programmes – the Community Nutrition Project (PNC), the Multisectoral Food, Health and Nutrition Project (PMASN), and the Nutrition and Early Childhood Development Project (PNDPE) – that established the governance and community infrastructure CASCADE now works within.

Between 2021 and 2023, GIZ's ProSAR programme made technical improvements to the tool and developed a digital version, which was transferred to ANCB for national scaling. In 2025, the tool was updated in collaboration with the Ministries of Planning and Development, Finance, and Decentralisation, and ANAN (the National Food and Nutrition Agency). A user guide, produced jointly by AMSANA/ENABEL, ProSAR/GIZ, and CASCADE, reflecting lessons from the 2024 training workshops, was validated at Lokossa in April 2025 and is publicly available through ANCB.<sup>4,5</sup>

## CASCADE's Role: Quality Use and Expansion

When CASCADE launched in 2023, SISAN already existed – tested and validated in northern Benin and transferred by ProSAR to ANCB for national scaling. CASCADE then integrated SISAN into its intervention areas and supported its practical application within the communes where the programme was operating. Working together, they secured political backing for SISAN, led advocacy with prefects and the Ministries

of Development, Finance, and Decentralisation, and created the conditions for SISA's adoption and practical use across all 77 communes. The SISA guide has since been updated, and the Ministry of Development has produced formal integration and review checklists to include in national guidance on elaborating and reviewing commune development plans (*Plans de Développement Communaux (PDC)*).<sup>1,3</sup> Formal adoption is expected by September 2026.

## Securing Government Backing and Training of all Communes

CASCADE and ANCB began with a two-day advocacy workshop in Dassa-Zoumè (August 2024), bringing together prefects, planning officers, senior ministry officials and other government actors. The outcome was a shared recommendation – adopted by the prefects themselves – that all communes should use SISA in their planning. ANCB presented the resulting roadmap to the national Prefects' Conference in Abomey on 14 November 2024.<sup>12</sup>

Three regional training workshops then reached all 77 communes in six weeks: Parakou (September), Porto-Novo (October), and Bohicon (October 2024).<sup>6,7</sup> Participants were executive secretaries, planning directors, and planning officers – the people who write plans and budgets. Many applied SISA to their own commune's documents for the first time during the sessions.

## Publishing a User Guide and Reviewing Progress

To ensure that SISA could be applied consistently by new staff in future planning cycles, the user guide was updated to reflect feedback from the 2024 training workshops and validated in April 2025, covering scoring, budget analysis, and illustrative examples. During this period, CASCADE also held two multi-day review workshops – in Bohicon and Natitingou – where communes examined their own 2023–25 nutrition budgets line by line, compared planned with actual spending, and identified barriers. On the fourth day of each workshop, mayors formalized written commitments to increase food and nutrition security allocations – a minimum of 3% annually in northern communes and 5% in the south.<sup>5,8,9</sup>

## Building Cross-Sector Action Plans and Tackling Budget Execution

Between July and September 2025, ANCB and CASCADE organised six departmental workshops across all CASCADE intervention areas to develop Common Results Frameworks (*Cadre Commun de Résultats*).<sup>11</sup> A further workshop at Grand-Popo in November targeted a specific gap: in many communes, nutrition budgets had been approved but not spent, due to administrative delays and unfamiliarity with processing this type of expenditure. Financial controllers attended alongside commune managers, as well as other Prefect leaders to help remove bottlenecks.

## Challenges

### Planning cycle timing:

Most communes finished their current development plans before the 2024 SISA training – delaying full integration until the next planning cycle, in the coming years.

### Missing local data:

Many communes do not have up-to-date local data on nutrition and food security, which makes annual SISA scoring difficult in practice.

### Infrastructure versus nutrition:

Some elected officials continue to prioritise road building and market construction over nutrition spending, which they consider less visible to voters. This sentiment is beginning to change, with mayors now viewing nutrition spending to demonstrate tangible impacts for their constituents.

### Security constraints:

Curfews and access restrictions in parts of Alibori and Atacora – due to spillover of insecurity from the Sahel – have limited project activities. In some affected communes, local governance capacity and data availability are limited.

### Budget to spending gap:

Planned budgets are often not fully spent. Addressing administrative delays in financial processing is an immediate priority.

## Results and Learning

### Budget Trends 2023–2025

Seven out of the nine CASCADE targeted communes with complete three-year records increased their food and nutrition security budget allocations between 2023 and 2025. Budget allocations are not the same as spending, and planned figures are not the same as disbursed ones. With that caveat, CASCADE can provide concrete evidence of how communes are increasingly prioritising nutrition within local planning and budgeting processes. Table 2 shows results from nine of the 20 CASCADE communes, which were selected for having the most complete three-year records. Planned and spent amounts differ significantly across communes.

**Table 2: Food and nutrition security budget allocations per commune, 2023–2025<sup>10</sup>**

| Commune    | FNS Budget 2023 (FCFA) | FNS Budget 2024 (FCFA) | FNS Budget 2025 (FCFA) | Change 2023→25      |
|------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Banikoara  | 82,334,543             | 109,599,000            | 2,487,025,971          | Increased sharply   |
| Malanville | 418,374,062            | 746,538,732            | 1,141,011,025          | Increased           |
| Karimama   | 364,076,780            | 434,490,168            | 951,370,168            | Increased           |
| Boukombé   | 257,280,611            | 377,468,482            | 642,724,141            | Increased           |
| Tanguïéta  | 559,500,000            | 705,812,236            | 858,038,019            | Increased gradually |
| Dangbo     | 39,691,302             | 71,722,050             | 272,449,485            | Increased           |
| Adjohoun   | 1,000,000              | 1,000,000              | 60,000,000             | Increased sharply   |
| Djidja     | 143,100,000            | 246,200,000            | 110,100,000            | Reduced in 2025     |
| Matéri     | 560,008,345            | 613,020,000            | 427,982,000            | Reduced in 2025     |

Source : CASCADE Bénin (2025). Budget SAN par commune 2023–2025. FCFA pegged to euro at €1 = 655.957 FCFA. Selected 2025 equivalents: Banikoara 2,487M ≈ €3.79M; Malanville 1,141M ≈ €1.74M; Adjohoun 60M ≈ €91,500. FCFA figures represent Programme Triennal d'Actions et de Budget (PTAB) SAN allocations – the commune's three-year operational budget.

Among northern communes, the trend was strongly upward. Banikoara's allocation rose 30-fold to 2.49 billion FCFA (€3.79M) – partly reflecting reclassification of existing spending after SISAN training, alongside genuinely new nutrition investment. Malanville, Karimama, and Boukombé each doubled or tripled their allocations. Tanguïéta's allocations also increased steadily across all three years.

In the south, Dangbo rose nearly sevenfold. The most striking turnaround is Adjohoun. In 2023 and 2024, the commune allocated just 1 million FCFA – roughly €1,500 – to food and nutrition. After SISAN training, the Executive Secretary reviewed the commune's plan and found that malnutrition treatment, nutrition education, and maternal health were either absent or underfunded. She used those findings to approach CD40, a French development fund, which agreed to co-finance a nutrition programme. By 2025, Adjohoun's nutrition budget had reached 60 million FCFA (€91,500) – a 60-fold increase backed by real activities and a new external partner.<sup>10</sup>

### Mayoral Commitments and Adoption

Mayors in southern communes signed written commitments to increase food and nutrition security budgets by 5% annually; in northern communes by 3%. Commitments were submitted to municipal councils for formal approval. All communes had held internal SISAN orientation sessions with their own technical staff by March 2025. Six communes formally incorporated SISAN into their current development plans: Abomey, Covè, Djakotomey, Djidja Klouékanmé, and Toviklin.<sup>8,9</sup> Most others had finalised their plans before the 2024 training, making the next planning cycle the main opportunity for full national integration.

## Women, Communities, and Ground-level Effects

Women of reproductive age and children are the primary target groups for CASCADE, and SISAN reflects this: the *accessibility* pillar assesses whether communes are supporting income-generating activities — many of which are women-led — and the Nutrition pillar specifically covers maternal nutrition, breastfeeding, and adolescent girls' diets. At the community level, women's cooperatives known as FaFa Wa – *Femme Autonome, Fille Ambitieuse* – have played an active role in supporting school canteens, helping improve the quality and quantity of meals for school-age children, and mobilising communities around nutrition in several communes.

SISAN creates the planning conditions for better nutrition outcomes. The following examples show what improved local governance is making possible at the community level. In Boukombé, women in the MARANATHA cooperative have begun processing groundnuts, soya, and roasted maize into an enriched flour rich in protein – developed to prevent malnutrition in young children – providing a locally produced, affordable option for nutrient-dense food in areas where treatment options are limited. In Dangbo, Adjohoun, and Bonou, similar community processing initiatives are underway with sweet potato flour. In Toucountouna, local authorities committed to making land reserves available to women for community and market gardens – improving women's income and making fresh produce more available locally.

In Malanville and Adjohoun, the communes organised public accountability sessions where local officials presented their nutrition commitments and progress to residents, civil society groups, and line ministry representatives. ANCB held this up as a model – an example of accountability becoming “*un réflexe*” – a habit rather than an obligation.<sup>12</sup>

*“L'application de SISAN a révélé l'absence de la SAN dans le PDC de la commune, ce qui a conduit à des ajustements — malgré les résistances rencontrées.” (“Applying SISAN showed that nutrition was missing from the commune's development plan. That led to changes — though not without resistance.”) —*

**Testimony from a commune participant, CASCADE/ANCB review workshop, Bohicon, March 2025**

## What this Means for Nutrition Governance

Four findings from Benin's experience with SISAN are relevant to anyone working to sustain and scale this approach – in Benin and beyond.

- **Tools built by – and for – local governments are more likely to be used.** SISAN's authority comes precisely from the fact that Benin's own planners designed it – in the language they work in, for the planning system they know. When ANCB endorsed it, SISAN gained national visibility and legitimacy within the municipal system.
- **Scoring budgets reveals what plans alone cannot.** A commune can include nutrition in its plan and allocate no resources to it. SISAN's budget module makes this gap visible. The three years of comparable data now available across 20 communes give a clearer picture of where commitment is real and where it exists only on paper.
- **Working through a body that represents all municipalities made national coverage possible.** ANCB's ability to bring all 77 communes to training – and to attach SISAN to its own institutional standing rather than to the project – is what made it possible to reach every commune in Benin in a single year.
- **Review sessions that use actual data are more effective than training alone.** The 2025 regional workshops, which gave communes their own budget figures and asked them to explain the gaps, generated more honest and more useful learning than the initial training sessions. The November 2025 workshop with financial controllers – which addressed a specific, practical obstacle to spending – is an example of how follow-up can be targeted at concrete problems rather than general capacity building.

## Priorities for 2026

- Getting SISA included in the Ministry of Decentralisation's guidance for the next generation of commune development plans, so it becomes a standard requirement rather than a project activity.
- Supporting advocacy for a dedicated national food and nutrition grant to communes (FADeC SAN) — a transfer from central government that would allow communes to fund nutrition activities without relying on project support.
- Using three years of comparable budget data from 20 communes to feed into national nutrition planning and policy reviews through ANCB and ANAN (the National Food and Nutrition Agency).

## Where Things Stand

In 2022, none of the following existed: a national nutrition planning tool designed by Benin's own municipalities; a published user guide for applying it; trained planning staff in all 77 communes; or three years of comparable budget data showing how much communes are allocating to food and nutrition. Important foundations for this now exist. Mayors have signed written commitments to increase nutrition spending. ANCB has formally endorsed SISA, presented it at the national Prefects' Conference, and published the user guide. The Ministry of Decentralisation was present at every key planning workshop. That is a meaningful shift in how nutrition is treated in local government.

Benin's municipalities developed this tool, and ANCB has supported its national rollout with engagement from relevant government actors. The Ministry of Development is now coordinating its integration into the national guidance for commune development plans — a

step that would make SISA a permanent feature in local planning and budgeting. CASCADE's role is to help secure the remaining conditions: a dedicated financing mechanism for commune-level nutrition spending, and a cycle of accountability that does not depend on project support. A government decision in May 2026 requiring all communes to update their development plans to 2033 creates the most concrete opportunity yet for full national integration, provided SISA is included in the Ministry's planning guidance before that process begins.<sup>13</sup> The foundations for institutionalization are now in place, but formal integration into government guidance and routine practice remain the next critical steps.

## Notes and Sources

1. Bénin MICS 2021–22, cited in ANCB/CARE Guide SISA (May 2025); Global Nutrition Report (2022).
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3. Sègla Lihoussou, ANCB, quoted in [Le Matin Bénin \(30 August 2024\)](#).
4. ACAD (August 2018). Conceptualisation du SISA.
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7. [ANCB \(October 2024\)](#). [SISA workshop Bohicon](#).
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