



Country strategy paper:

Benin country programme 2023 – 2027

Introduction

In July 2022, ERIKS initiated the implementation of its new global strategy 2022-2026. The new strategic vision emphasizes gender-transformative, conflict and climate change sensitive programming interventions to enable vulnerable and excluded girls and boys to grow up healthily, to learn, to participate and thrive. Thus, ERIKS' West Africa regional team has developed a new country strategy for Benin allowing ERIKS' work in Benin to align itself with the new global strategy of ERIKS. The Benin country strategy for the period 2019-2022 was focused on the following impact areas: The right to quality education, the right to health, the right to protection, and the right to humanitarian assistance in resilient communities.

This country strategic framework is the fourth for Benin and is based on revision of the previous one (country strategy

2019-2022). It is the result of a participatory process that took place from January to August 2022. It went through various stages, including two workshops for self-assessment of the ongoing country strategy and community consultations (in Parakou and Kandi) within the projects' intervention and impact communities. This process was led by the regional office team with support and inputs from the Head Office and participation of the implementing partners, local authorities, child rights-based organisations, children, youth, and community leaders.

The first objective of the self-assessment workshops was to analyse whether the strategic objectives of ERIKS and those of the partners were realistic, considering the principles of child rights-based programming and the changes in the areas where the partners' projects were implemented. The

second objective was to identify lessons learned and good practices for the new strategy. Finally, the community consultations included consultations and individual interviews with representatives of local and national government technical structures, NGOs, as well as community-based organisations, local councillors, community leaders, girls, boys, and youth in ERIKS' main intervention areas.

ERIKS' aspiration in Benin is to spark a paradigm shift in cultural beliefs, social norms, traditional practices, and government policies so that vulnerable and excluded girls and boys, can grow up healthily, learn, participate, and thrive without danger or fear. ERIKS in Benin aims to be a reference organisation recognised for the defence of the rights of vulnerable and excluded girls, boys, and young people, in particular girls,

in the thematic of childhood health, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). ERIKS aims furthermore to be recognised and achieve sustainable change in the area of quality and inclusive education, youth employability, childhood development and gender-sensitive protection.

This revised country strategy presents the main issues girls and boys are facing to achieve their rights in Benin and main strategic directions for ERIKS' work in the country the next five years to contribute to respond to these issues and to participate to the implementation of ERIKS' new international strategy. The country strategy draws its inspiration and guidance from the SDGs, the National Development Plan and ERIKS' position papers and policies.

Strategic orientation

The role and contribution of ERIKS

In Benin, ERIKS is one of the international NGOs acting for promotion and achievement of child rights. Even if ERIKS is not very well-known at the national level, it has a strong community-based impact through its local implementing partners. ERIKS has proven experience in local partners' capacity building and communities' engagement for child rights. In previous strategy periods, ERIKS' partners have benefited from several initiatives to build their capacity through trainings organised by ERIKS on child rights programming, child participation, good governance within NGOs, planning and preparedness for disaster risk management etc.

ERIKS is known as an organisation supporting projects focusing on child rights areas such as inclusive and quality education, gender-sensitive protection, childhood health,

household economic security and children/youth participation. ERIKS also has an experience in the support of child protection systems through strengthening of the community-based child protection mechanisms. Through the partnership with DEDRAS, ERIKS is part of the "Zero tolerance for child marriage" campaign launched by the government with the support of partners in 2017. ERIKS is also engaged in child rights monitoring of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in collaboration with Plan International, EDUCO, UNICEF and local organisations through its partnership with CIPCRE.

ERIKS has also experience in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights for adolescents and young people. Indeed, ERIKS and local partners has developed strategies that help to build the capacities of girls and boys and to set



Training for adolescent girls and boys on daily life skills in the commune of Kandi.

up community discussions of reflections, intra and inter-generational dialogues on attitudes, behaviours, and harmful social norms in terms of human rights as well as sexual and reproductive health. These initiatives help to establish quality communication between adolescents (boys and girls), their parents and members of the community on subjects deemed taboo, especially in social environments deeply rooted in the culture. Partners Organisations (POs) experience, capabilities, values, and commitment add value to each one of ERIKS' ongoing strategic commitments. However, there is still room for adding a more substantial value to achieve greater impact, strengthen partnerships with government bodies and fostering greater change at the local level.

Finally, based on previous ERIKS interventions, we can note that the partner organizations in Benin have a high potential for added value that will contribute to the delivery commitment in the four overarching result areas

- Providing real access to **education**, at all ages, for the most marginalised is at the heart of ERIKS' funded interventions and commitment to reinforce the rights of children, particularly girls and children with disability, to complete their education.
- Effective relationships within the community to help create effective channels for **children and young people to advocate** towards decision makers.
- Young people's access to **quality health services** and comprehensive education on **sexual and reproductive health and rights** is an important aspect of POs' work, which can complement and reinforce these two essential aspects of ERIKS' programming in Benin.
- Working with child clubs for girls and boys and other community groups resulted in strong commitments and initiatives to **prevent and address violence against children**. This will complement and reinforce the work of ERIKS for the right of the child to protection.

Thus, to achieve the objectives of the 2023-2027 strategic framework in Benin, ERIKS' role will be manifested through three main levels of collaboration:

Firstly, ERIKS will continue developing its collaboration with partner organisations that initiate and implement interventions based on the expertise of both the partner and ERIKS.

Secondly, ERIKS will through its partner organisations collaborate indirectly with various duty bearers and rights holders in each project area. ERIKS' strategies in Benin depend upon close interaction with these potential change agents, and on the active participation of children, in line with the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and ERIKS' Theory of Change. Sustainable solutions to the problems faced by children in Benin rely on collaboration with duty bearers from both civil society and the state, as reflected in the Results Framework below.

Thirdly, ERIKS will continue developing its coordination with other NGOs, INGOs and State representatives through relevant child rights networks. This step is new in the strategic approach of ERIKS in Benin with the opening of an office which will allow it to have a more active role in the various networks for the defence of children's rights.

As explained above, ERIKS' strategy for Benin reflects ERIKS' Development Policy through partnership with civil society, child rights programming and strategies aligned with ERIKS'

Theory of Change. The new strategy for Benin is in line with ERIKS' international strategy also in terms of its increased emphasis on gender mainstreaming, resilience, conflict sensitivity and child participation. ERIKS' work in Benin for resilience will go beyond sustainable local mechanisms for sustainable livelihoods and food security. Another important aspect is the resilience of the human capital, which requires a particular focus on children's right to education, health, and protection.



Cultural activity of the children's club of the Yassaga school in the commune of Matéri

Learning and strategic choices

The work of ERIKS and its partners over the last three years of operationalisation of the 2019-2022 country strategic framework has enabled ERIKS to implement several projects for the benefit of children, girls, and boys, in Benin on many themes related to the strategic directions defined in that strategy: The right to quality education, the right to health, the right to protection, and the right to humanitarian assistance in resilient communities.

The self-assessment carried out by ERIKS' partners of the projects planned and implemented by them in Benin within the previous strategic framework shows that these projects were in general relevant. They were consistent with the SDGs: 2 - fight against hunger, 3 - access to health, 4 - access to quality education and 5 - gender equality and with the Government's Action Program and the various laws, policies and/or or national strategies such as the child code, the National Child Protection Policy, the municipal development plans of the areas of intervention and the strategic plans of ERIKS and its partners. The projects have also been aligned with the intentions of treaties and conventions signed by the State of Benin, including the UNCRC and the ACRWC. ERIKS' projects have been particularly aligned with the UNCRC

articles 12 (Respect for the views of the child), 19 (Protection), 24 (Health), 27 (Adequate standard of living), 28 (Education), 32 (Child labour), 34 (Sexual exploitation) and 35 (Trafficking) and with the ACRWC articles 16 (Protection against abuse and torture), 21 (Protection against harmful social and cultural practices) and article 27 (Sexual exploitation). They were also aligned with the needs of local rights holders (children, families, communities). This relevance was emphasised by children, families, and local authorities as well as community leaders during the review of ERIKS' previous strategic plan.



Advocacy presentation by the children's mayor of the commune of Kandi.

Nevertheless, the strategy review also revealed gaps in partners' knowledge and practices regarding rights-based programming. Other main gaps were weak child participation and gender mainstreaming, accountability, the non-inclusion of children with disabilities and those who are not enrolled in school, and furthermore the partners did not fully apply basic HRBA approaches in some projects where duty bearers are considered but did where partners implemented some direct actions without adding advocacy actions to push duty bearers to appropriate decisions. Therefore, ERIKS will continue its capacity developing role in relation to its partners with a specific focus on the principles and strategies of the HRBA and the Child Rights-Based Approach, CRBA: Child participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, and gender-sensitive approaches adapted to the local context.

The implementation of projects in the previous strategy period has made it possible for ERIKS' partners to learn in areas such as Partnership, Project design, Implementation of interventions, among other things. Capacity development of partner organisations on the child rights programming principles and strategies and monitoring visits by the ERIKS regional team have contributed to improving quality of interventions. Some points for improvement have also been raised, which include:

- The weak positioning of ERIKS in the networks, thematic groups, or platforms of civil society organisations working on similar themes at the national level by the regional office of ERIKS.
- The lack of thematic studies conducted/supported by ERIKS, its partners and the technical departments which could provide the information needed to deepen the analysis of some issues affecting girls and boys.

Considering these lessons learnt, **key interventions for the next five years** are defined based on the three dimensions of the Theory of Change contained in ERIKS' international strategy, for sustainable impact at the level of children, moral duty bearers and legal duty bearers and at all levels; from family, community, and national level:

- Promotion of **responsible parenthood**: Changing attitudes and behaviours and reinforcing positive practices of parents towards girls, responsibility shared for childhood care, including the protection of girls and boys.
- Work with **community leaders** (religious and traditional and child clubs and groups for adolescent, young girls, and boys) to bring about meaningful and lasting change in removing barriers that limit the realization of child's rights.
- ERIKS and its POs will invest in developing the capacities of young girls and boys, effective partnerships, and community mobilisation to contribute to access to **quality sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services** for adolescents.
- Intensification of activities in synergy with other organisations to influence policies and influence government, local authorities, and other duty bearers to increase resources for:
 - **safe inclusive quality education**, especially for girls and children living with disability.
 - **access to health care**, even in an emergency or crisis, especially for vulnerable children.
 - **sexual and reproductive health and rights** and combatting related gender-based violence.
 - **strengthening the national child protection system** with a focus on the specific needs of vulnerable children, including girls and children with disabilities.

The abovementioned key interventions are expected to result in sustainable changes that can be summarised in three strategic directions set by ERIKS and its partners:

- **Support improved access to and use of quality sexual and reproductive health services** for adolescents and young people, especially the most vulnerable and excluded, in an environment of gender equality, including in humanitarian contexts.
- **Promote safe, inclusive, and quality education** for all vulnerable and excluded children, especially girls, children with disabilities as well as decent employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for young girls and boys including in humanitarian contexts.
- **Strengthen early childhood development and protection of vulnerable and marginalized children** and young people, especially girls, from all forms of gender-based violence, including in humanitarian contexts.

These strategic directions are in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are also reflected in Benin's national priorities.

About **humanitarian action**, particular attention will be given to ways of **strengthening local prevention mechanisms and the resilience of communities through improved and sustainable livelihoods**. As before, livelihoods will be a means of realising child's rights to education and health. ERIKS' approach will aim to empower children (boys and girls), young people, families, and communities to be key players in the process of lasting and positive change in their lives.

Together with its partners, ERIKS will improve its ability to influence legal duty bearers to protect child's rights in Benin. In a transversal way, for the immediate needs of the children for which the government has no immediate solutions, ERIKS will through its interventions provide the immediate solution, while setting up with its partners the mechanism (advocacy/capacity development) which will have to bring the legal and moral guarantors to assume the continuity of the services within education, protection, health, etc.

Finally, to further establish its actions and its visibility in Benin, ERIKS will work for framework agreements with the government, and from the local governments to improve its visibility and its positioning on common initiatives and in line with programmes of relevant sectoral departments such as the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Promoting gender transformative initiatives

Promoting gender-transformative initiatives will involve ERIKS and its POs to consider not only the respective needs of men and women, boys, and girls but also to target negative gender norms that can lead to violence against boys and

girls, and to remove barriers that prevent them from reporting and seeking help to end violence, abuse, and discrimination in their lives. ERIKS and POs will ensure that girls acquire the confidence, skills, and culture necessary to create and develop their own capabilities and that they receive the support they need to overcome gender-related obstacles.

ERIKS will continue to develop skills internally and among partners in using a gender transformative approach, including conducting context-specific gender analyses, and integrating the result in planning, management, budgeting, and evaluation of interventions. ERIKS will also engage in national and local advocacy for gender equality and equity. Lastly, ERIKS aims to adopt different work approaches to foster positive change and challenge gender norms in its own and partners' work culture.

Rights-based approach (including participation)

ERIKS will act as a catalyst and influencer, drawing on the normative framework for its work in partnership with local partner organisations in all contexts, a framework provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter of Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, international humanitarian law and the standards and principles enshrined therein.

ERIKS' work in Benin will be based on the three pillars of child rights programming, with a focus on capacity development of duty bearers and of children/right holders. When relevant, ERIKS and its partners will engage in strategic



Girl leaders of the commune of Sègbana.

advocacy, in collaboration with other organisations. To be efficient, advocacy shall be rooted in partners' own experiences of the rights holders' situation in the communities where they are working. Direct actions will be limited and focused on filling gaps where a relevant response from the duty bearers is difficult to obtain within a reasonable time. It shall be part of a wider advocacy approach to put pressure on duty bearers to fulfil their obligations. Therefore, partners' knowledge and expertise from local and municipal level shall be used as the primary basis for efficient advocacy work. If used as a leverage for advocacy, and not as a substitution for duty bearers' work, direct action can both increase the credibility of ERIKS and its partners and their possibility to hold duty bearers accountable for the fulfilment of the rights of the child.

ERIKS and its POs will work with girls, boys, young people and their families, grassroots community organisations (including those of children, young people) to promote social norms, attitudes, behaviours, and relationships that foster lasting positive change and safety nets for girls. To maximise its impact, ERIKS and POs will also work in accordance with Benin's legislative framework on human and child rights, as well as related policies and institutional framework. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, specific emphasis will be placed on the rights of girls because girls are often invisible and specific initiatives must be developed to combat the discrimination and inequalities they experience.

Girls, boys, and young people will be involved and participate in all ERIKS funded interventions, as actors in their own development. This participation must be safe, transparent, and informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant, and appropriate for children and young people (including girls); it must also be gender-inclusive, risk-sensitive and supported by capacity development and accountability.

Open, responsible, and accountable

ERIKS will ensure that POs report openly and transparently on all their work, successes, and failures and how they use the resources entrusted to them. They should commit to using these resources responsibly to generate the greatest lasting impact for vulnerable and excluded children. Wherever ERIKS works, ERIKS carefully considers whether and how it can add value to community development efforts. ERIKS' staff listen to girls, boys and communities and ensure that the organisation applies the highest standards to keep children and young people, as well as adults, ERIKS' own partners and the environment safe every time they interact with ERIKS.

To ensure its work is useful, relevant, and respectful for those it works with, ERIKS and POs will ensure that they jointly reflect and explore ways to improve and adapt to changing circumstances, by continuously establishing opportunities for dialogue and feedback and ensure that ERIKS' and POs' decision-making and practices respond to what they agree with them on. This continuous improvement work will also include adjustments of funding mechanisms, such as programme- and core support if relevant.

Through program monitoring activities and field visits, ERIKS will ensure strong and inclusive community engagement

with feedback from children, young people, other community members and partners for its contributions to the development of their communities.

Work in all contexts

Benin is a country exposed to the risk of natural disasters. Although the country is not considered to be very prone to disasters, it is faced by an increase in the frequency of natural disasters over the past ten years (in particular floods) and most recently with the terrorist attacks in the North. The risk of terrorism has been very high since 2021 in the North-West and East of Benin, the effects of which continue to weaken the socio-economic situation of already vulnerable populations whose economic activities are negatively affected by the security problems, with negative consequences for girls, boys, and young people.

Stakeholder capacity development

ERIKS and its local partners will seek to empower children, families, and communities to play a leading role in the process of achieving lasting and positive change in their lives. As part of its strategy, the West Africa Regional office will invest in capacity development, effective partnerships, and the mobilisation of key actors within the community to strengthen them to respond effectively to child rights issues. Strengthened civil society organisations (CSO) networks will be supported in the child rights monitoring through the technical assistance to the government to produce its mandatory reports, and support to produce alternative reports by civil society organisations related to the UNCRC and the ACRWC.



Teenage girl beneficiary of support for income generating activities in Gogounou

Country outcomes

The following outcomes have been defined for ERIKS' work in Benin during this strategy period, based on analysis in sections 2 and 3 below:

1.1. Outcomes under Partnership

- 1.1.1 Partner organisations apply a contextualised **Child Right Based Approach** and work according to the **General Principles of the UNCRC**
- 1.1.2 Partner organisations apply gender and **conflict sensitivity, including religious sensitivity**, working according to Do No Harm principles and Child Safeguarding Policy/Child Protection Policy
- 1.1.3 Partner organisations enhance the **respect of the natural environment and reduce the risks and consequences** faced by girls and boys **due to climate change** within the local context.
- 1.1.4 Partner organisations are **financially stable, cost efficient** and apply **democratic governance principles** within their organisations.
- 1.1.5 Movements/associations of youth and children, especially girls, are working at a local or national level to **change norms and make their views heard**.

2.1. Outcomes related to girls and boys as right holders

- 2.1.1 Girls and boys, **including those with disabilities**, from communities and **organised groups of children** have the skills and capacities to initiate and implement initiatives to **promote their right to quality and inclusive basic education** in a safe environment for the benefit of school and **out-of-school children and those affected by humanitarian crises**
- 2.1.2 **Adolescents and young people (girls and boys) benefit from quality information and services** on their right to health and their sexual and reproductive rights, and **make informed decisions about their health and rights Sexual and Reproductive Rights**, including Harmful Practices and Other **Forms of Gender-Based Violence**
- 2.1.3 Girls in the intervention areas have access to appropriate sex education and take initiatives to promote **menstrual hygiene and the fight against GBV pregnancies in schools and in workplaces learning**.
- 2.1.4: Girls and boys participate in **peer education, take, and implement** initiatives to promote their **right to protection** can make choices in the face of abuse and exploitation and to report these situations.
- 2.1.5 Girls and boys have life skills that promote their **socio-professional and economic integration and reintegration for the promotion of peace and social cohesion**
- 2.1.6 Girls, boys, adolescents, and young people actively **participate in decision-making** processes in their decisions affecting them and in the development initiatives of their communities, **including measures aimed at preventing and reduce the risk of conflict, disaster, and climate hazards**

2.2. Outcomes related to legal duty bearers

- 2.2.1 Legal duty bearers fulfil their obligation to create an enabling environment that guarantees the right to **quality and inclusive education** for girls and boys, including the

disabled, through the establishment and implementation of laws, policies and structures centred and adapted to the learner, **alternative education initiatives and technical and vocational training**, even in the event of a humanitarian crisis

- 2.2.2 Legal duty bearers provide **health services adapted to the needs of children and young people** (girls and boys) including access to WASH and promote good sexual and reproductive health and the nutritional status of children (girls and boys) under 5 years old
- 2.2.3 The government meets its obligation to put in place **safe, effective, efficient, and functional child protection systems and mechanisms** for better protection of children, adolescents, and young people (girls and boys) against violence, abuse, and exploitation in all its forms, including harmful traditional practices, even in the event of a humanitarian crisis
- 2.2.4 The government facilitates the **active participation of organised groups of children** (girls and boys, including the disabled) in public spaces to make their voices heard and influence decisions that concern them

2.3. Outcomes related to moral duty bearers

- 2.3.1 Moral duty bearers play an active role in monitoring public strategies and defending the right of girls and boys to enjoy **safe, inclusive, and quality formal and non-formal education** in communities.
- 2.3.2 Moral duty bearers defend the right of girls and boys to **quality and adapted health services** and develop their capacity for dialogue and support for children on their right to health sexual and reproductive health and have the skills to protect children under 5 against preventable diseases and all forms of malnutrition
- 2.3.3 Community members have **functional, safe, accessible, and effective child protection mechanisms** that prevent and respond to child protection concerns and challenge the State on compliance with its commitments to child protection
- 2.3.4 The **resilience** of local communities and food systems is strengthened through the integration of **disaster risk reduction** measures, including risks related to climate variability and change, into community development programs.
- 2.3.5 Parents and caregivers have strengthened skills for resilience, and are better prepared to cope with **climate change, conflict, and displacement**.

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