**Committee: African Union**

**Topics:** Access to Education for Women and Girls, Foreign Direct Investment in Africa, Promoting Integrity and Transparency in Democratically Elected Governments

**Country:** The Republic of Benin

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Benin is a country located in West Africa, bordered by Togo to the west, Nigeria to the east, and Burkina Faso and Niger to the north. As one of the most stable democracies in West Africa, this sub-Saharan nation is dedicated to achieving equal education, promoting transparency and integrity in the government, and increasing foreign direct investment in the country.

**TOPIC ONE:** Access to Education for Women and Girls

After years of strategizing how to further advance African nations, the time has come for the African Union to recognize the importance of having post-2015 framework solutions, even though the deadline for Millennium Development Goals (MDG) has passed. Countries still have not achieved what they had wished to in regard to access to education for women and girls. The delegation of Benin recognizes that due to varying factors like the socio-economic status of the majority of its citizens and cultural expectations, the exclusion of women and girls from learning is prominent. However, as a nation with a democratically elected governing body dedicated to improving access to education for all genders, Benin believes that with the help of international partners and NGOs, this change can be achieved.

The 1990 Constitution of Benin, grants women and men equal economic and social rights as citizens. In 2006 Benin adopted the 2006-2011 strategic guidelines for development which seek, among other things, the promotion of gender equality, women’s empowerment, and improved social protection. In March 2009 the Government of Benin adopted a National Policy for Gender Promotion, which aims to achieve, by 2025, equality and equity between the sexes with a view towards sustainable human development. Although these policies show great strides on behalf of the government, girls still struggle to get an education: girls have to trek long distances to attend school; girl’s face scrutiny from their communities for choosing to go to school over aiding their families and girls fear they will be harmed on the long journey to school.

UNICEF has already implemented a program in Benin where girls in 16 different districts of Benin walk together to school, called “big sistering”. Programs like these ensure that girls get to school safely, tackling one of the barriers facing girls. The delegation of Benin would propose that rather than only invoking laws and legislations, the government works hand in hand with communities to help increase the number of women gaining a useful education. The country will see an increase in attendance of girls in school if they implement affirmative action programs, install stay-safe programs and introduce volunteers into communities with the goal of educating locals on the importance of education.

For real change in the lives of girls and women to be achieved, there must be a

collective effort. Programs like giving each community a certain amount of livestock(goats and chicken) for sending girls to school would demonstrate the government and community involvement in educating their women. This would give communities an incentive to send their women and girls to school so as to get an education, as well as benefit from the livestock provided by the government. As Benin’s livestock population has seen a 40% increase, the reward system is clearly a good government initiative. As well, another possible solution would be building wells and water treatment facilities closer to villages so that families have easy access to water and girls needn’t walk hours to get water for their families. With the help of international organizations, these programs can be accomplished, and Sustainable Development Goals(SDG) can be achieved.

**TOPIC TWO:** Foreign Direct Investment in Africa

   Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa can only survive depending on multiple factors, one being the political stability of the country. When governments are democratically elected, it creates stability and transparency for investors to invest in that country. The second most important part of direct investment in Africa is educating the middle class who are responsible for the political and financial structure of the country. Direct investment in Africa will eliminate the corrupt bureaucracies of these countries who have been extorting the country's wealth, undermining stability and discouraging FDI, as well as opposing the investors’ repatriation of their investments.

The various African governments have to work hard to invest in the country's infrastructure, education and economic growth to raise the value of their currency. This strong currency will allow international financiers to invest in a flourishing economy in which they feel that their investments are well deserved and can produce success for both the investor and the host country. Every nation in Africa has to build their human resources for their country to prosper and encourage FDI. The delegation of Benin believes that as a country with a stable economy with a growing GDP, the country is well positioned to be a recipient of FDI. Having had a democratically elected government for the past 27 years, the country has displayed how politically sound it is. The current President of Benin, Patrice Talon has said that a key focus, while still in office, will be to attract FDI in Benin, so as to secure the future prosperity of the nation.

Nations in Africa have become welfare states or states that have failed themselves and their people, economically, educationally and politically. Aid dependency has become a necessity in these countries, promoting a culture of entitlement among some African states. To deal with this calamity of aid dependency in Africa, and to have a smooth transition to self-sufficiency, African nations have to build strong political parties that can act on legislations that deal with development. Getting away from corrupt societies and building a strong educational system, as well as a reliable infrastructure, will allow African countries to smoothly transition from the dependency of aid to self-dependency. Benin has already taken great strides to become self-sufficient, and worthy of support, by contributing foreign aid funds to better society as a whole. Through infrastructure and economic ventures, the country is seeking to be self-reliant.

The influence of superpowers contribution to  FDI in Africa has its pros and cons. The government of China backs Chinese investments in Africa, and they are filling the vacuum left by the European, Canadian and American companies. Chinese investment is geared towards the exploitation of the natural resources of a country for the exchange of building infrastructure. The downfall is that these companies owned by the government of China bring their own nationals, instead of hiring the locals. They neither create jobs for the locals nor do they teach the locals the skills needed to build these projects in the future. Most African nations are content with China’s investments because all of Africa has been struggling to create strong infrastructure, and now the Chinese are here to build it. However, the delegation of Benin suggests that instead of bringing foreign workers over to these countries, multinationals should hire local labor, and invest in social advancements to improve the stability of the country, so as to attract more FDI. China has become one of Benin’s largest foreign investors, as China views Benin as a strategic ally. Through the port of Cotonou, the country has become a major commodity transfer center for western Africa. The delegation of Benin believes that more countries need to be as advantageous as China in investing in Africa.

Multinational organizations of European and North American origins, though they were in Africa originally, left little for African nations to build upon and benefit from learning. As they pulled out of Africa, they took their knowledge and expertise with them, leaving Africa to figure out the rest for themselves. These multinationals were repatriating their investments instead of reinvesting into areas of greater need, like education and technology. Benin concludes that African nations should create legislation that holds FDI companies socially responsible for the advancement of economic, educational and technological development. This would ensure political and economic stability and prevent these corporations from exploiting nations that are not in a position to negotiate.

**TOPIC THREE:**  Promoting Integrity and Transparency in Democratically Elected Governments

   Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. In order to fight corruption at all levels of government, all loopholes must be closed so that those who seek to take advantage of the system are unable to. Corruption damages society because it creates economic instability, leaves government tasks unfulfilled, resulting in government taxes and reserves being abused and destroys the legal system. Moreover, it diverts public funds, hindering the country's ability to implement social welfare programs, and effectively alienates foreign investors. Corruption can be prevented in many ways, but the key to it is the promotion of integrity in civil society. The delegation of Benin would start by informing civil servants and civilians of the negative repercussions of corruption and how it slows down the progress of the country, which ultimately affects them. In addition, it would establish guidelines that dictate what is expected of civil servants, and failure to follow guidelines would result in suspension, substantial fines and jail time. Thus deterring people from committing such an offence.

The Republic of Benin has made enormous progress in democratic governance, specifically with the transparent and peaceful election of the current president, Patrice Talon. The government has accelerated its efforts to reduce corruption, by promoting administrative and institutional reforms. In 2011, anti-corruption legislation was passed, and anti-corruption institutions have been established. Organizations dedicated to fighting corruption in all forms have been created, like the National Public Procurement Regulatory Authority which fights corruption, bribery, and money laundering.

In spite of Benin being one of the most stable democracies in the region, it still faces widespread corruption at all levels of government operations. As a result, many foreign countries have halted aid to the country. Most notably, the Netherlands in 2015 had decided to refrain from sending Benin foreign aid due to corruption. Netherlands was one of Benin’s largest donor of water projects. However, after spending €70 million on water and sanitation project, the Netherlands became suspicious of fraud after there had been no progress made on their investment. After looking over the 2015 audit, their suspicions were confirmed, and they decided that effective immediately, they would halt foreign aid being sent to Benin. This shows how foreign countries are apprehensive about investing in a corrupt nation where their generosity and investments are not being used for the right purposes. The delegation of Benin believes that there have to be measures taken by the government to combat all sorts of corruption within the government. By educating government officials, paying civil servants well, improving transparency on government spending and implementing strong anti-corruption legislation, Benin will be able to gain back the trust of foreign investors, as well as its citizens.

By educating government officials about the effects of corruption and creating a no-tolerance policy with respect to it, the government of Benin will be able to have credible civil servants. Furthermore, the country should utilize technology by digitalizing state documents like court records and government audits so that citizens can use the information to hold the government accountable. In addition, the government must use third party mediators to overlook government spending, public funds and different branches of government so as to crack down on corruption. International organizations like the International Monetary Fund(IMF), the World Bank, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) can all be employed to help the country take precautions against corruption.

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