

19 Drinking Water Supply in Benin

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Drinking water in Benin is taken from very different sources, ranging from open surface water to tap water. A state-owned service, the SONEB (Société Nationale des Eaux du Bénin), provides tap water in the cities, while the DGO (*Direction Générale de l'Eau*), another public service, is responsible for water in rural areas, where no main supply exists. Limited access to safe drinking water and spatial disparities in supply still characterize the water situation in Benin.

Drinking water supply in Benin

Data on water supply at a national scale is available through the 2002 national census (INSAE, 2003). Although the data do not reveal the complexities of the drinking water situation, which is characterized by the use of various sources by the same users at different periods and places, it gives an overview about the drinking water supply in Benin. During the census, heads of household were asked about their principal drinking water source. Nevertheless, though the emphasis was on "the principal source", it is highly likely that other sources of drinking water beside the ones mentioned are used by the same households.

However, spatial disparities in the supply situation become evident when mapping these data at the level of Benin's *Arrondissements*.

Mostly safe drinking water sources

The different types of drinking water sources can roughly be divided into mostly safe and mostly unsafe sources (Tab. 1 and 2, ↗21). Only 54.5 % of Benin's households drink predominantly safe water. In rural areas, this refers mainly to pumps, cisterns and drinking fountains (↗21). Tap water, considered the safest water source, is only available in the cities and thus in a very small part of the country (Fig. 1).

Even in the cities, many people do not have their own tap water supply, but instead buy water from people who are connected to the mains. There is a growing informal market for tap water around the urban centres in Benin.

Tab. 1: Households using mostly safe drinking water (INSAE, 2003)

tap water (household connection)	externally purchased tap water	drinking fountain	pump	rainwater collection
9.8 %	21.3 %	5.7 %	15.3 %	2.4 %
54.5 % (of all household heads)				

Mostly unsafe drinking water sources

Open water sources like rivers, ponds and wells can be regarded as water sources that are likely unsafe: 45.5 % of Benin's households mainly use these unsafe water sources. Even modern wells are often contaminated (↗21).

Besides some areas in Southeast Benin, such as the lower Ouémé valley, unsafe drinking water is a major problem in other parts of the country. For a significant number of households, surface water from rivers, small ponds or water holes still constitutes the principal drinking source. There are several reasons for this situation, but in many villages, water pumps or even modern wells are either absent or do not bear enough water across different seasons.

Tab. 2: Households using mostly safe drinking water (INSAE, 2003).

protected well	unprotected well	surface water (river,pond)	other water	not determined
8.2 %	22.3 %	13.0 %	0.7 %	1.3 %
45.5 % (of all household heads)				

References

INSAE (2003): Troisième Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitation. Cotonou.

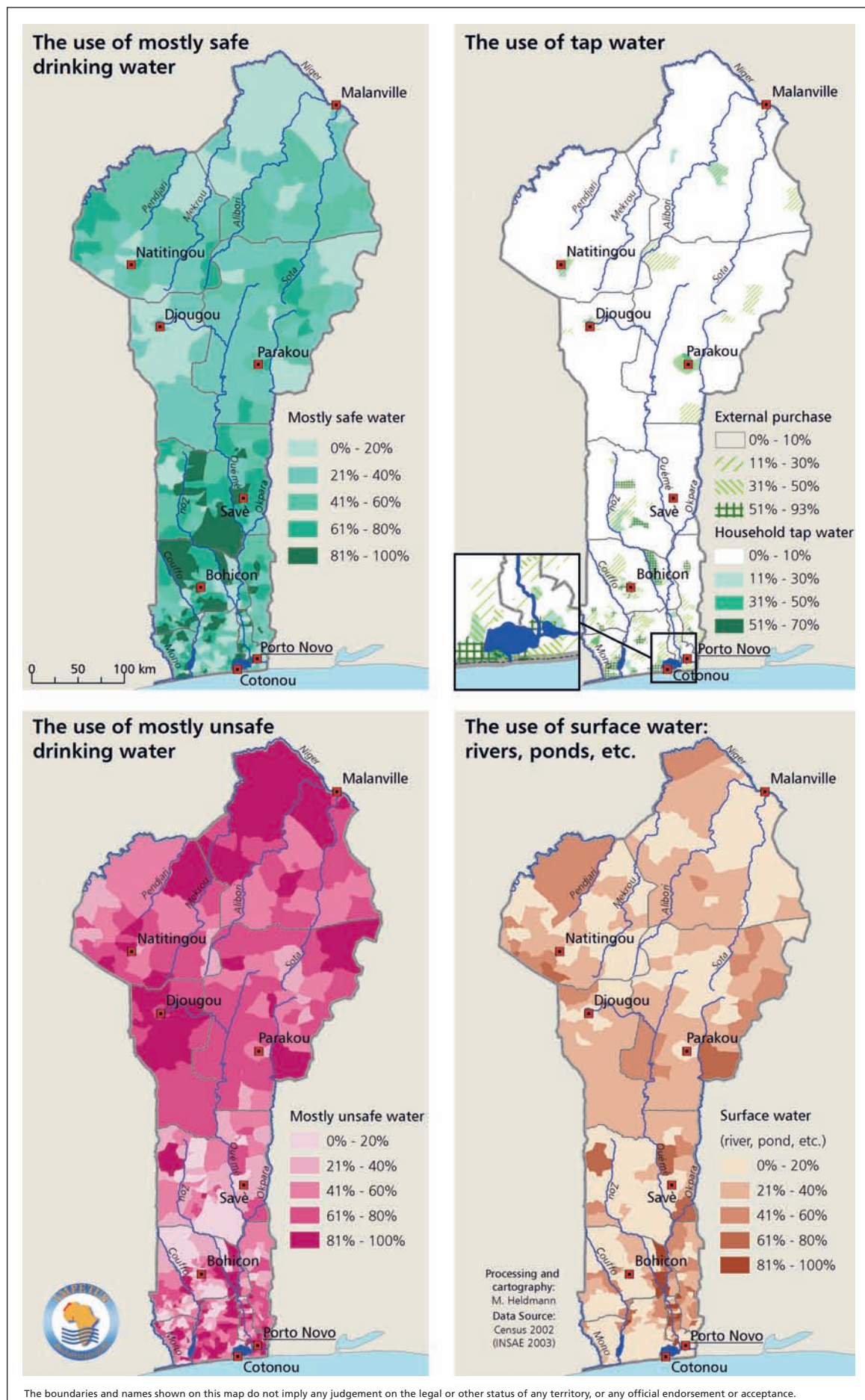


Fig. 1:
Drinking
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in Benin