



# **CIVIC TECH IN AFRICA: PEOPLE AND TECHNOLOGY DYNAMISING OUR DEMOCRACIES**

Benin – Kenya – Senegal – Tunisia

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### A study labeled by Digital Africa



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## FOREWORD

For several years, Africa has been testing its ability to innovate its digital, social and financial practices. Kenyan pioneers such as Ushahidi or M-Pesa have commented that Africa is a force to be reckoned with, a continent whose boldness, ideas, flexibility and the needs of its people in these areas have gradually converged with the sharp increase in the capacity of broadband networks and the number of internet users.

African civic tech has developed gradually, by taking on the democratic aspirations of African society for greater transparency and accountability in political decisions and public action. Committed citizens, activist networks, civil organisations, journalists and developers have mobilised digital tools - and social media in particular - to develop projects that will facilitate the emergence of communities, mobilising individuals around causes of common interest.

A few years ago, the media development agency CFI took the decision to support these civic tech initiatives, which encourage the mass circulation of fair, balanced information. In meeting the needs of young people and their growing demands for accountability and transparency with flagship projects like Connexions citoyennes, Open Data médias, PAGOF and Hiwar Tounsi, we are speculating that these actions will form a cornerstone of the response to the challenge of sustainable development for Africa.

With this study, CFI intends to explore its knowledge of the dynamics and obstacles facing the world of civic tech in Africa. We selected four countries: Benin, Kenya, Senegal and Tunisia, which reflect all the different, complementary worlds in terms of their approach to the digital sphere, connectivity, and their legal and economic frameworks. This study will thus help us to plan future projects to support digital initiatives by young people looking to engage in social, political and economic innovation, and by doing so, contributing to build the African democracy of tomorrow.

### **Marc Fonbaustier**

Chairman of the Management Board of CFI



*For several years, CFI has supported the digital projects of young Africans in the field of social, political and economic innovation.*

## INTRODUCTION

The first signs of what we now call African civic tech can be traced back to Kenya, in 2007. Active citizens (bloggers and software developers) decided to create an online platform to report on post-electoral violence. Ushahidi (which means “Testimony” in Swahili) was born. It would go on to be used in every corner of the world, to mobilise the public to gather useful information and make it available to everyone.

A dozen years later, the term civic tech began to appear on specialised websites and at cutting-edge conferences, to describe experiences that combine the new technologies (with their participatory dimension) with the longed-for revitalisation of democratic practices.

This movement was fuelled by a strong belief: digital tools would allow the disenfranchised to play their part in defining, implementing and monitoring public policies.

To conduct this study, we went out to meet the people leading civic tech campaigns in Benin, Kenya, Senegal and Tunisia, to form an “identikit picture” of these young people (often aged under 40), who want to get involved in politics in the noblest sense of the word.

The method we used for this study was inspired by investigative journalism.

The study involved three stages:

- 1. Surveying and mapping the civic tech projects and initiatives** in each of the four countries, to identify the players and stakeholders in the sector;
- 2. In-depth interviews with people representing the diversity of the various projects**, in order to identify and understand the factors of success and failure behind the existing projects, good practices, measures to support the financial backers, and the performance indicators used to measure the impact of each project;
- 3. Processing the information we gathered**, to give us a snapshot of the situation and an accurate diagnosis of the needs of the people involved in the sector.

These are the statistics for the four countries covered by this study: 69 civic tech leaders, 83 different projects and 47 financial backers.

We also conducted 34 in-depth interviews in early summer 2018, in Benin, Kenya, Senegal and Tunisia.

# WHAT IS CIVIC TECH?

Civic tech is such a new term that it still lacks a stable, commonly-accepted definition. Often, people have never heard the expression, including people working in the field that civic tech projects cover.

The online encyclopaedia Wikipedia defines civic tech as the processes, tools and technologies that allow the improvement of the political system. The most comprehensive definition is the one formulated by the Knight Foundation in its 2013 report, updated in 2014.

According to that definition, civic tech uses technologies to reinforce:

→ **the openness and transparency of governments and local authorities**

For example: access to data and transparency, facilitation of the electoral process, the mapping and visualisation of public information, the exploitation and use of public data, participation in the drafting of laws and government decisions etc.

→ **civic engagement**

For example: the development of public networks, the engagement of local communities, crowdfunding, the sharing of public data, the creation of public lobbying and public mobilisation platforms.

*The concepts of civic engagement and transparency of public action are at the heart of civic tech initiatives in Africa.*



# EXAMPLE PROJECTS

## Ushahidi

Created in December 2007, the online platform Ushahidi (“Testimony” in Swahili) was originally designed as a tool to highlight the streets to avoid during the post-electoral riots in Kenya. Users could report incidents they had seen, by text message. The data was then posted on an interactive map. Since its creation, the site has been used more than 125,000 times in more than 160 countries (including during the Obama campaign in 2012). Ushahidi has mainly been used in major crisis areas: the Haiti earthquake, violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Burundi elections, the tsunami in Japan, and the war in Syria.



### Stacy Gitau

Graduate of Strathmore University in Nairobi, with a passion for development technologies, Stacy is responsible for innovation at Ushahidi. Her career included a stint at iLabAfrica, where she managed various tech projects. She is an advocate of training young people to use technology (particularly mobile phones) more efficiently, and is committed to providing training and skill enhancement for women in the tech sector.

## PesaCheck

The first project in Africa aimed at fact-checking and decoding government budget information, PesaCheck monitors the promises made by political figures in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The project acts as an intermediary between experts who are able to decipher and analyse figures and other complex data, and the media, who have direct contact with the public, on the other hand.



### Eric Mugendi

Passionate about technology and writing, Eric has made fact-checking about public finance his main cause. As the chief editor of PesaCheck, he is in the front line of the fight against misinformation in Kenya, and also the rest of Africa. He defends the idea that people should not rely solely on media analysis, when it comes to understanding public data.

## Al Bawsala

Al Bawsala scrutinises the work done by public lawmakers and executive bodies in Tunisia, at national and local levels. The organisation's work puts people at the heart of political action, by keeping them informed about how public funds are managed, and what the people in power are doing. The organisation's work includes compiling a directory of elected representatives, monitoring their activities and presence in the Assembly.



### Selim Kharrat

After working as a management consultant for various organisations in the field of international solidarity and human rights, Selim Kharrat returned to Tunisia after the revolution in 2011. The co-founder of Al Bawsala, which he ran for two years, he is actively committed to various projects led by Amnesty International, and regularly blogs about the socio-political situation in Tunisia.

## Winou Etrottoir

Originally, Winou Etrottoir ("Where's the pavement?") was a civic movement launched on the social networks to report antisocial conduct, absenteeism among people in positions of power, and the illegal use of public land caused by unauthorised building. The movement evolved into a pressure group, lobbying local authorities, before it was transformed into an association in 2016. At the municipal elections in 2018, members of the group also attended the elections under different labels.



### Rafik Al Falah

Committed to the fight against corruption in Tunisia, Rafik Al Falah is a trained engineer, and a founding member and Secretary General of the Winou Etrottoir association. Convinced that democracy and civic engagement go hand in hand, he is an advocate of protecting public space against what he describes as attacks by shopowners illegally occupying pavements and other pedestrian areas, with complete disregard for the law.

## Tunisian Association of Public Controllers (ATCP)

Since its formation in 2011, the ATCP has paid great attention to the fight against corruption and the misuse of public funds. It was behind the first national website to publish official data on public projects (cabrane.com). The website and app provide official information about public contracts, classified by category. The data is gathered from ministries, governorates and other local authorities.

This gives web users access to information about the cost of a project, the progress of the works, the contractor, and the completion date.



### Charfeddine Yakoubi

Member of the executive office of the Tunisian Association of Public Controllers (ATCP) and project leader at Cabrane, Charfeddine Yakoubi has decided to work towards greater transparency within Tunisian administrations. He believes that transparency in the management of public funds will help to build a climate of confidence between public authorities and their citizens.

## Barr al Aman

Barr al Aman is a play on words in Arabic. When read quickly, it becomes "barlamane" ("parliament"). The association hopes to improve public policies through the media. Its activities include a weekly radio broadcast, which is aired on national Tunisian radio. The programme gives a realistic, public-focused account of issues related to decentralisation and local elections, but also deals with administrative procedures, the functioning and malfunctioning of State institutions.



### Khansa Ben Tarjem

Khansa Ben Tarjem, a Tunisian journalist and reporter, was one of the founders of Barr al Aman in 2013. She deals with the current political and social affairs in Tunisia, with a particular focus on security issues. She has worked as a freelance journalist for le Monde Afrique, Inkyfada and Reuters TV.

## Les cahiers de Ganiath

Les Cahiers de Ganiath is a blog that works to uncover and offer visibility to the owners of innovative projects in the field of digital, culture and enterprise. Armed with her smartphone, the blog's author turns the spotlight on young people from Benin who have a real desire to forge their own destinies. The young entrepreneurs share details of their work, their motivations, and their ideas on how to fight the issues generally encountered by startupper in Benin.



### Ganiath Bello

A journalist with a passion for writing and literature, Ganiath Bello currently works for the webTV channel of the University of Abomey-Calavi. In 2014, she decided to set up her own blog, posting content about children's rights, the promotion of women, and culture. Starting from the premise that traditional media only deals with political subjects, she set herself the target of giving a voice to ordinary people working with limited means to improve their daily lives and have a positive influence on their communities.

## VOA Citoyennes

The association Voix et Actions Citoyennes (VOA Citoyennes - Citizens' Voices and Actions) aims to use the digital world to strengthen young people's commitment to improving local and public governance. To achieve its objectives, this newly-launched organisation runs training sessions on digital literacy. It also conducts advocacy initiatives, promoting the efforts of young people involved in monitoring public actions.



### Antoine Osé Coliko

A legal expert specialising in cases of violence against girls and women, Antoine works with various associations. Committed to projects to train young people to engage actively and responsibly in civic issues, he thinks that civic engagement is of vital importance in building a harmonious society. His dream is to see a generation of citizens who know their rights, and also their duties, not only in Benin but across the whole continent.

## Transparencevote 229

Launched in July 2017 by a team from YALI (Young African Leaders Initiative) in Benin, #transparence229 aims to improve young people's contribution to achieving a transparent, fair electoral process. Its actions include: producing a report evaluating systems designed to guarantee a fair, transparent electoral process in the wake of the 2013 Electoral Code. The campaign has also trained 90 young people from Benin on the principles of transparency and integrity in the electoral process.



### Franz Okey

Franz Okey, a project management engineer, is active in civil society with a particular focus on issues of governance, civic engagement and democracy. As a holder of a scholarship from the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) initiated by former US President Barack Obama, Franz brings together other beneficiaries of this programme, to work on various projects related to transparency and accountability of the public executive, relying in particular in information and communications technologies.

## Save Dakar

Using photo reportage and social media publications, Save Dakar alerts public opinion to the damage caused by laxity and the lack of public spiritedness in Dakar. The collective is raising awareness of the importance of respecting public assets and property. This participatory project operates by photographing examples of antisocial behaviour (squalor, illegal occupation of streets, motoring offences) and launches a debate about the reported cases. Some of its publications regularly receive responses from the authorities, who are keen to resolve the issues reported.



### Mandione Laye Kébé

A photographer and infographist from Dakar, Mandione Laye Kébé focuses on civic engagement, respect for public property, and for the environment. With the Save Dakar project, he brings together contributions and discussions from thousands of his fellow citizens, on the topic of personal responsibility for protecting the environment and safeguarding property. In addition to his online work, Mandione is also behind operations to clean up beaches, schools and streets in the residential areas of Senegal's capital city.

## Elle citoyenne

Originally an individual blog, Elle Citoyenne has now evolved into a platform where people can share information and experience, mainly run by and for women. Around forty volunteer contributors, both male and female, seek to promote the actions of ordinary people working for the good of their communities. The site also receives suggestions from ordinary people in response to the social and political issues seen in African countries.



### **Anne-Marie Befoune**

A translator by trade, and committed to civic engagement issues, Anne-Marie Befoune found the internet to be an easy way to get people's voices heard, and to have their contributions included in decision-making processes. She believes that an ideal society is one in which every member of the public is aware not only of their rights, but also of their duties. This translates into personal involvement in the implementation of change, without necessarily waiting for reform to be done by the people in power.

## **Rufisque Tech Hub**

A "third place" based in Rufisque, 25 km east of Dakar, the Rufisque Tech Hub aims to boost local democracy thanks to the bonds that link the web and social networks. To achieve its objectives, the association promotes use of the internet and of the new communication tools. Its activities include conferences, internet and social media induction courses, and live broadcasts of municipal council meetings.



### **Alexandre Guibert Lette**

A journalist, blogger and cyberactivist, Alexandre is a co-founder of Rufisque Tech Hub. He advocates for greater involvement of young people in political life. He is convinced that using the community-oriented functions of the internet will fuel dialogue among ordinary people, and between citizens and the political decision-makers.

## **OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATION: TO MAKE THE LEAP FROM WORDS TO ACTIONS, WHEN IT COMES TO DEMOCRACY**

The civic tech projects identified in the four countries in this study were all formed spontaneously. None of them was started as a result of external encouragement (by international donors or other partners), although many of them did benefit from post-launch support.

These civic tech initiatives are often launched because of frustration and dissatisfaction with the perceived gap between the official discourse (on democracy, transparency and the fight against corruption), and the reality on the ground.

All the projects have one thing in common: they offer ordinary people and web users a voice, and they allow that voice to be heard. The use of communication and mobilisation tools is starting a brand-new process of expanding the public space, enabling a new kind of interaction between the executive and ordinary citizens.

The stated objectives of the people we spoke to are focused on deepening and entrenching democratic practices. This involves, in particular, reporting abuse and corruption, and also a form of exemplarity of action, intended to make words coincide with actions.

## **ORGANISATION AND SKILLS: SMALL TEAMS, STRONG INVOLVEMENT**

Whether they are born from an idea by one individual, or by mobilising a small core of people, the civic tech initiatives whose leaders we met, all have one thing in common: they are mainly run by small teams that encapsulate a range of skills.

Usually started by people from an academic background or with considerable professional experience, they often seek to bring together a core of motivated volunteers, within a collective, before moving on to a more formal structure, particularly when it comes to sourcing finance.

Each project sets up an organisation whose structure will depend on the age of the project, the extent of the finance available, and finally the number of people actively involved on a full-time basis. Few of the people we spoke to had any prior experience of working with financial backers or implementation agencies.

In the case of Tunisia, we noted that a number of project leaders had international experience (particularly in France). In Tunisia in particular, we also noted the important role of people from the Diaspora.

# LAWS AND REGULATIONS ARE ADAPTING, THE AUTHORITIES ARE LAGGING BEHIND

The legislative and regulatory context is leading to a situation of contrasts, between countries where the framework is generally favourable to the development of digital projects - particularly civic tech - and those that do not have any specific answers in this area.

In Kenya, laws that lay the foundations for the development of civic tech projects have been adopted, mainly thanks to the existence of a proposed framework for accessing information. These laws may require, for example, that government bodies disclose information in the public interest, or prepare an annual report giving details of what they have done during the year. Penalties are also imposed on people or authorities who do not provide this information.

In Tunisia, the new constitution and the law on accessing public information provide a framework that is entirely positive for the development of civic tech activities, as was emphasised by the people we spoke to. In particular, Article 32 of the Tunisian Constitution provides that “the State guarantees the right to information and the right of access to information”.

## Data access systems are still rarely implemented

In Senegal, the authorities' attitude to civic tech initiatives is not very positive. Civic activists who highlight the shortcomings in public policies are regularly suspected of being political opponents. The new digital communications code adopted in June 2018 is concerning to activists and defenders of freedom of expression. They point to a certain vagueness and imprecision about the concept of traffic regulation by the Telecommunications and Postal Regulation Authority (ARTP) and operators. The activists consider that the new law will give power to the regulator and to the operators to restrict, block, slow down, filter or survey access to WhatsApp, Viber, Messenger, Skype and similar programs.

In Benin, the 2015 law on communications and information established an important legislative framework for the respect of democratic principles and freedom of expression. However, the poor application of laws deprives the country of a stable, permanent framework that would give civic tech initiatives the best chances of developing. The government's plan - which was ultimately aborted - to impose a tax on access to social media, is an indication of this instability.

In all the countries we studied, we also noted that the attitudes of politicians and officials is often out of step with the laws. Data access and transparency systems are only understood and implemented infrequently. The tools used by the administration are a long way from encouraging sharing (low level of digitalisation and where digitalisation does exist, the formats used are of little relevance).

# RESEARCH INTO THE ECONOMIC MODEL

Civic tech projects are developed spontaneously, and in most cases are the result of their initiators' frustration. Each project develops its own spirit, which determines the way it will operate, and guides the actions it takes. But the question of the economic model poses a number of questions.

While some initiatives want to remain charitable, mainly to preserve their freedom, and even limit their ambitions, most project owners we spoke to stated that they want to become professional, to expand the scope of their actions, or to make them permanent. However, this powerful upswing needs human resources and equipment, which the project owners can find it hard to mobilise.

To fund their actions, crowdfunding is often the first avenue they explore. Crowdfunding sites are little used in this context, as the activists prefer WhatsApp or Facebook, and cash payments. While the social networks and messaging apps are more commonly used by their target public, they are not real crowdfunding tools in the true sense of the term. Raising funds through this channel is temporary and informal.

Four main trends emerged with regard to funding:

## 1. Small-scale volunteer projects driven by one or more people.

The volunteer project Tribune Citoyenne is mainly funded by contributions from its members, and by calls for funds from the former members of SOS Civisme Benin.

The volunteer model is the same one as is used for Elle Citoyenne. The project team fears above all that potential backers would impose restrictions. The three permanent members of the team, and the contributors, all work without any financial consideration.

At Winou Etrottoir, there are no backers, as the association is fiercely independent, and is run exclusively by volunteers. The members' contributions allow the association to meet its financial needs.

Save Dakar relies on donations from the online community. The cleanups of beaches, schools and residential streets in Senegal's capital city are all funded by charitable donations. When the project was launched, Mandione Laye Kébé investigated which kind of economic model would allow the association to operate professionally, by mobilising people on social media.

## 2. One-off projects benefiting from subsidies from different backers (embassies, NGOs and international organisations), whose work falls within the backers' sphere of activity.

In Benin, 95% of the funding of Citizens' voices and actions came from the Accountability Project Support Fund (FOSIR) set up by the House of civil society and Swiss Cooperation. The rest of the funds came from the project owner, on an ad-hoc basis.

The Africtrivistes movement also relies on donations. However, it is exploring options to fund the work of a small, full-time team within the association. The funds obtained from backers and some embassies only fund the association's projects, not its operational costs.

### 3. Projects that sell services or promote knowledge.

PolitAgora obtained the funds it needed to launch its work by winning a hackathon with a prize of €3000. This enabled the young team to launch their project during the municipal elections in Tunisia, in spring 2018. The team now wants to develop paid services as a start-up, based on the technologies and data it produces.

Écoles du Sénégal, which was launched after winning social or digital enterprise competitions, has now evolved into an incorporated company, with share capital of 6 million CFA francs. To fund itself, the project relies mainly on its reputation, and ability to mobilise people. Agrifood businesses and high schools are willing to pay for a stand at events organised by the association, which can attract hundreds of students.

Ushahidi has opted for a business model based on fundraising, and on sponsorship from businesses and foundations. Specialist services to support capacity to use the product post-download are also offered. The platform is funded by eight financial backers. All of Ushahidi's Kenyan team is paid.

### 4. Projects run by large, mainly professional organisations who can respond to complex calls for projects and bear the costs of managing the allocated funds.

To publish its "Présimètre", the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) can rely on funding of up to 90% from the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). The organisation, which relies on a team of almost twenty employees, works on multiple projects funded by various backers.

KICTANet collaborates with local and international organisations and enterprises. The platform is supported by eight organisations, mainly through donations or funding for specific projects. Contributions from the private sector and from the local and international members of the platform also allow it to pay its staff.



*Civic tech initiatives often bring together a core of motivated volunteers within a community, before moving on to a more formal structure, particularly when it comes to sourcing finance.*

## NARROWING THE GAP BETWEEN PROJECT OWNERS AND INTERNATIONAL BACKERS

On several occasions, we noted that there was a large gap between the expectations of the project owners, and those of the financial backers from international funds or implementation agencies.

As civic tech is a new world, populated by “beginners” in the field of project management, this is a dynamic, unscripted and as yet informal sector.

For their part, the backers have put in place procedures for the project owners who have more experience in elaborating this type of programme. There can be misunderstandings about the expectations or priorities of one side or the other.

There is a need to reduce this gap, by encouraging exchanges between project owners and backers or agencies, by means of regular meetings, providing training on project management, and on how to respond to calls for tenders or projects.

On their part, backers can be asked to adapt some of their systems to make them more accessible to project owners who are used to working in a digital world where fluidity and speed are the keywords.

## POTENTIAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR CIVIC TECH ACTIONS

The question of the impact that civic tech initiatives have, beyond their audience, is rarely considered mainly due to the conceptual and methodological complexities of this issue. It is also partly due to the costs involved in dealing with this aspect.

According to several of the project owners we spoke to, data concerning traffic and the volume of interactions on social media take precedence over the real, long-term impact of the projects.

The capacity of social networks to provide audience or engagement statistics is used to measure the impact of the implemented projects. In reality, these indicators are chosen more for their ease of access than because of their actual relevance. In a number of civic tech actions, it is the audience indicators similar to those of the media, which are taken into account.

In Kenya, the volume of downloads and the number of users are the main performance indicators for Ushahidi. There is a similar trend for PesaCheck, which is essentially based on the number of web users on the site.

***“It is difficult, and expensive, to carry out a survey to measure a project’s impact. Basically, we rely on the volume of interactions with our posts on social media”.*** **Mandione Laye Kébé, photographer and founder of the Save Dakar project**

Anne-Marie Befoune from Elle citoyenne mentioned that there is a focus on the short-term impact, to the detriment of the long-term benefits and impact of the associations’ actions.

Without being restricted to the online audience or social media, some projects use informal indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of their work. *“The fact that the Tunisian government involves the Cartocitoyenne project in workshops with the authorities and civil society regarding the implementation of the law on data access might be an indicator, although a very informal one”* commented Khalil Teber from Fondation Rosa Luxemburg, the project’s main financial backer.

Winou Etrottoir has different impact data. The Tunisian association gives a label to the candidates in the municipal elections, and relies on the number of labelled candidates who are elected. *“In the municipal results, we noted that Winou Etrottoir has had an impact. We gave candidates the possibility of running, and for some of them, of being elected”*, was the enthusiastic comment from Rafik Al Falah, Secretary General of the association, which has transitioned from civic action to political action.

## WOMEN’S PLACES STILL LIMITED

We did not find any more women involved in civic tech projects than in other areas of activity, digital or non-digital. In Benin, Senegal and Tunisia, we did encounter women, but mostly in projects linked to health or environmental issues, for example. There were few women in other areas of action.

*“Men and women have the same energy, but often the subjects they deal with are different”*, remarked Florent Youzan, an activist who works to defend open source, and who is currently the Director of Société Générale’s Innovation Lab in Africa.

When asked about the low female numbers, the men and women we spoke to indicated that women were reluctant to take the step into entrepreneurship, and to formalise their ventures.

Kenya is an exception, to the extent that we noted that parity does exist: we found just as many women as men in civic tech projects, even though the women appeared to be slightly less represented when it came to speaking publicly and taking centre stage.

## ISSUES OF TRANSFER BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND VETERANS IN CIVIC TECH

The first initiatives in civic tech on the African continent date back around a dozen years. The pioneers, then aged 25-30, are now in the 35-40 age bracket and are capitalising on their experience with civic mobilisation and the management of digital projects.

The question of how to transfer knowledge between the veterans of civic tech and the younger generations arises because the mobilisation of young adults who engage in these civic projects is often spontaneous.

Angry in the face of the abuses of corruption or the lack of consultation of the public in political decisions, young people often have no method to attack these problems. This sometimes leads them to target political figures individually, rather than the system that allowed the abusive practices to emerge.

The issue of training appears to be key, in facilitating the sharing of experience between the veterans and the young activists, for example mentorship schemes have been launched in Kenya and could be deployed in the other countries, particularly for the bloggers' associations.

## HINDRANCES AND OBSTACLES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC TECH

"Finally, what do you think is missing?" This is the question we asked all of the people we spoke to, in order to identify the main hindrances and obstacles to the development of civic tech in their countries.

There are various types of hindrances. The first is the capacity to mobilise the public, and to involve them in projects launched in connection with civic tech initiatives.

Convincing the authorities and the political world that these projects are well-founded is another difficulty. At best, bureaucratic rigidity can stifle good intentions; at worst, the owners of these projects are considered to be opponents.

*"Initially, I was "lynched" on the social networks", remembers Mandione Laye Kébé (Senegal). "People didn't understand the approach, which consisted of photographing the unhealthy condition of the streets. They accused me of tarnishing the image of Dakar. Then, a few days ago, people posted public apologies on Twitter, recognising that they hadn't initially understood the approach. They even suggested taking part in the next city clean-up days".*

Bureaucratic rigidity can also stifle good intentions. We have even seen political exploitation taking place, where civic tech players are approached and sometimes even hired by the administrations, in West Africa.

***"The law stipulates that you can write to the decision-makers to request information, but they ignore your questions". Francis Monyango, avocat kényan***

Access to funding is one of the main difficulties pointed out by the project owners. There is also increasingly strong competition between the organisations, in a context in which funds are becoming harder to source.

Finally, the lack of human resources with the skills needed to manage complex projects such as those connected to civic tech, is also mentioned as an impediment to the development of initiatives in this area. *"It is not just civic tech, but in general the field of associations and entrepreneurship in Tunisia that lacks even basic skills (replying to an email, knowing how to communicate, using digital devices)"* comments Khalil Teber from the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation.

The challenge over the next decade consists of gradually removing these hindrances and obstacles in a way that allows these civic tech initiatives to become firmly rooted in Africa's democratic landscape.



*Lack of training, and the difficulties involved in mobilising the public and the political world, are major impediments to the development of civic tech projects.*



## Connectivity

In 2016, the percentage of the population of Benin with an Internet connection was 11.99%, compared to 3.50% in 2011 (UIT statistics). The government’s recent intention to impose a tax of 5 CFA francs (€0.007) per megabyte for access to over the top (OTT) services, thus making access to Facebook or WhatsApp more expensive, triggered a heated debate within the country, leading the government to abandon its plan.

## National policy

Benin introduced an information and communications code in 2015. Articles 6, 7 and 8 indicate a digital policy that is moving in the direction of freedom of expression. This legal instrument was supplemented by the digital code adopted in November 2017.

## Freedom of expression

Benin obtained a score of 82/100 in the 2018 Freedom House report on freedoms. Freedom of expression in Benin is not afflicted by any major limitations, and use of social media for policy improvement is permitted, as the actions of civic tech players have testified for two years.

## History and development of civic tech in Benin

In Benin, civic tech projects are at a fledgling stage, with “fairly young” people involved, as was seen during the last presidential elections in 2016, won by Patrice Talon, and the launch of the “Talonmeter” which checks that the new president respects his campaign promises.

The development of civic tech initiatives in Benin has been gradual, with players forging relationships and partnerships with public authorities. The legislative framework is also quite favourable to the development of projects, and to their sponsorship by financial backers.

## Strong emergence of Benin in the civic tech arena, but consolidation is needed

Over recent years, Benin has made a remarkable entry into the arena of innovation in new technologies in West Africa. After watching other countries in its region launch projects since 2010, to encourage the growth of the digital sector, Benin embarked on this route in 2015, with the appearance of co-working spaces, the launch of hackathons and various training programmes, and the setting up of associations such as the bloggers’ association.

Most of the civic tech initiatives were set up to monitor the 2016 presidential elections. There is a fairly large number of initiatives, and they have benefited from funding by multiple international backers. Since the enthusiasm of the post-electoral period has receded, there has emerged a need to consolidate and reinforce a sector that has not yet had the time to structure itself.

<b>Population</b>	10,800,000
<b>Capital</b>	Porto-Novo
<b>GDP/capita</b>	\$784
<b>Press Freedom Status</b>	Partly Free

## Freedom in the World Scores

### Freedom Rating



### Political Rights



### Civil Liberties



**Aggregate Score: 82/100**

Source: Freedom House Report 2018



## Connectivity

The level of Internet penetration in Kenya was estimated at 26% in 2016 according to the UIT. With regard to 3G/4G coverage, Kenya is a pioneer in Africa, with 40% of the adult population having at least occasional access to the Internet, according to figures from Pew Research. Mobile Internet will be more rapid than in the United States.

## National policy

In 2014, the country's parliament adopted a legislative framework for digital and ICT policy. The Kenyan Commission for Human Rights recognises the link between Internet use and freedom. In 2016, the law on access to information had a positive impact on the consideration given to civic tech projects by state institutions.

## Freedom of expression

According to the 2017 edition of the Freedom House report on Internet freedom in Kenya, the country is placed 29<sup>th</sup> on the global ranking, but still needs to take important steps. Many bloggers and social media users in Kenya have been arrested or interrogated in recent months for expressing critical views online, and this indicates an alarming trend in terms of freedom of expression.

## History and development of civic tech in Kenya

The first civic tech initiatives appeared even before the term civic tech was coined. Many of these initiatives are now at an advanced stage of maturity, in particular Ushahidi – launched in 2008 during the violent post-election uprising - and also Mzalendo (“patriot” in Swahili), whose stated mission since 2005 has been “to keep an eye on the Kenyan Parliament”.

Kenya has adopted a number of regulatory instruments that make room for projects based on new technologies to encourage public participation, improve democracy, and strengthen respect for rules on transparency.

## A pioneering country, with civic tech projects looking to gain autonomy

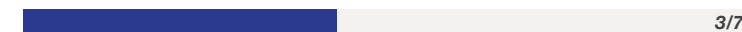
If Kenya is now a pioneer in Africa, in many aspects of digital, this is thanks to various elements: a good quality connection, a positive legal and regulatory framework, high quality university education and without doubt, an important flow of trade, mainly with the USA (the setting up of large American businesses, high level of university exchange between these two countries).

The developments in the digital arena have allowed the emergence of a large, active community.

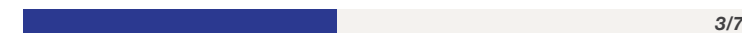
<b>Population</b>	45,400,000
<b>Capital</b>	Nairobi
<b>GDP/capita</b>	\$1,350
<b>Press Freedom Status</b>	Partly Free

## Freedom in the World Scores

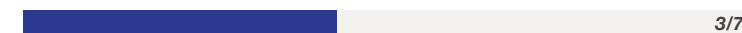
### Freedom Rating



### Political Rights



### Civil Liberties



**Aggregate Score: 48/100**

Source: Freedom House Report 2018



## Connectivity

Senegal is still a leader when it comes to Internet access in West Africa. According to data from the Telecommunications and Postal Regulation Authority (ARTP), the country has more than 10 million Internet users in 2018.

## National policy

Senegal does not have a specific legislative framework for civic tech. The regulatory framework for telecommunications has evolved in recent years with the aim of increasing the population’s access to broadband services, and adapting to the regulatory provisions of the UEMOA and the CEDEAO. This development is leading to concerns among defenders of human rights that there will be restrictions on use and increased surveillance of Internet users, masked as anti-terrorism measures.

## Freedom of expression

In terms of democracy, Senegal is one of the most stable countries in West Africa. According to the 2017 Freedom House report on freedoms in the country, it has risen by three points, gaining a score of 75/100 in 2018.

## History and development of civic tech in Senegal

The “Y en a marre” (“We’ve had enough”) movement, which was launched in 2011, played an important role in the 2012 presidential elections, by clearly taking a stand for the defeat of Abdoulaye Wade. In tandem with this, a group of bloggers led by Cheikh Fall launched #Sunu2012, a site that monitored the electoral campaign and the voting process. This allowed only people to monitor the electoral process, with real-time broadcasts by national and international media, thus probably limiting the temptation of fraud, when it came to counting the votes.

With Dakar, which has been in a privileged situation in terms of Internet connection in West Africa since the early 2000s, Senegal has been able to develop pioneering initiatives. For example, Senegal is the home of Jokkolabs, the sub-region’s first coworking space, which was launched in 2010.

## Although a pioneer in 2012, Senegal is no longer at the cutting edge of civic tech in 2018

Although one of the pioneering Internet countries in West Africa, Senegal’s experience is now outdated. Various initiatives could have emerged over the years in a country in which the political cycles have certainly opened up more room than elsewhere, for the development of these activities.

Despite its “front line” position, Senegal has not really developed any particularly noteworthy project in this area, since the public monitoring of the 2012 elections, through #Sunu2012 and Sama Baat.

Has the country’s focus on the entrepreneurial aspect of digital projects and the attraction towards the start-up model turned young people with the necessary skills towards areas of action other than the exploration of democracy based on digital tools?

<b>Population</b>	14,800,000
<b>Capital</b>	Dakar
<b>GDP/capita</b>	\$911
<b>Press Freedom Status</b>	Partly Free

## Freedom in the World Scores

### Freedom Rating



### Political Rights



### Civil Liberties



**Aggregate Score: 75/100**

Source: Freedom House Report 2018

## Connectivity

The level of Internet penetration in Tunisia was estimated at 55.50% in 2017 (source: UIT). In terms of the speed of the mobile network connection, Tunisia is ranked 65<sup>th</sup>, with an average connection speed of 6.17 Mbps. Of all the countries in our study, Tunisia is the one with the largest percentage of people online.

## National policy

There is no specific legislative framework for civic tech projects in Tunisia. However, the Assembly of Representatives voted in the Start-up Act in April 2018. The content of the act was developed in collaboration with civil society, financial backers, business incubators and the Administration. The act defines the financial benefits available to start-ups, and it can be exploited for use by civic tech initiatives wanting to establish a startup in Tunisia.

## Freedom of expression

Tunisia is one of the rare countries in Africa in which Parliament has adopted a law to protect whistleblowers. Although the country has a high level of Internet penetration, it has a low score (38/100) when it comes to freedom of the Internet. According to Freedom House, Tunisia is a country in which respect for freedom is effective, with a score of 70/100.

## History and development of civic tech in Tunisia

It was the fall of the dictator Ben Ali that kickstarted the first civic tech projects in Tunisia. Since the 2011 revolution, these initiatives have multiplied, to support the creation of democratic institutions. These initiatives are often supported by a number of international backers in search of projects to fund.

Several flagship projects have emerged in this context, such as the one organised by the Association Al Bawsala, which monitors the activity of Parliament, with instant shares, through the Marsad initiative. There are now large parts of political activity which are scrutinised by these civic observers and shared with the public.

## Digital citizenship still in the early stages

Despite the progress made, transparency and sound governance are yet to be consolidated in Tunisia. To achieve the goal “*people need to be conscious of their roles and get involved at every level of decision-making*” commented Selim Kharrat, the executive director of Al Bawsala who says that he is split between frustration and the desire to take action. The challenge for those initiatives that have reached this stage of maturity is now about establishing themselves for the long term (by consolidating their business model), with measurable effectiveness (by developing civic schemes for assessing public policies).

<b>Population</b>	11,300,000
<b>Capital</b>	Tunis
<b>GDP/capita</b>	\$3,828
<b>Press Freedom Status</b>	Partly Free

## Freedom in the World Scores

### Freedom Rating



### Political Rights



### Civil Liberties



**Aggregate Score: 70/100**

Source: Freedom House Report 2018

## CONCLUSION

Civic tech projects, initiatives that use new technologies in order to explore democratic practices (civic engagement, the accountability of public institutions, transparency and the fight against corruption) allow a larger section of the population to be included in public life, more quickly and at a lower cost.

In the four African countries targeted by this study (Benin, Kenya, Senegal and Tunisia), and in Africa as a whole, the growth of civic tech indicates that people need to convert their frustration, and sometimes their anger in the face of the (often very noticeable) disconnect between the official statement of principles (democracy and sound governance) and a reality that is very different from the official discourse.

### Evolving at different speeds

The growth of the civic tech sector in Africa is happening at different speeds. The project initiators are evolving in very different legislative and regulatory contexts. On the one hand, there are countries that do have a framework that is generally favourable to the development of digital projects - particularly civic tech - and on the other, there are those that do not have any specific answers in this area.

The distrust of public powers, the problems involved in mobilising large communities and the difficulties of accessing finance, are significant impediments to the upgrading of civic tech projects, which are in most cases the result of spontaneous initiatives.

The formalisation of training actions, and the sharing of experience and skills, which already exists in an informal context, needs to bring forward communities of experts and skilled citizens, in order to make an effective contribution to the design, implementation and monitoring of public policies.

### Strengthening the human dimension

Having passed the first stage of online mobilisation, an expansion of the scope and impact of these projects will require a strengthening of the human dimension, and of the physical interaction between civic tech players, people in power, and citizens with low, or no, connectivity.

After a decade of emergence, the crucial issue now facing civic tech projects is to go beyond the construction of ephemeral communities formed around specific causes, to create durable dynamics of collective intelligence and collective action, involving a large number of people.



*In Tunisia, as in Benin, Senegal and Kenya, the younger generation knows how to mobilise itself for civic tech actions. However, they still need to be trained, and to be given confidence.*



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