

# CASE STUDY: BENIN AND ESTONIA'S E-GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP



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## ABSTRACT

Over the past three years, Benin has made remarkable progress in digital transformation, designing national e-government frameworks, and developing e-services for citizens and businesses. This case study shows how, guided by strong political will and motivated public officials, with the support of the Estonian e-Governance Academy and partners from the private sector, Benin has set an example for many countries.

## Key messages

- Where there are limited financial and human resources, it is important to have a clear understanding of the context and overall governance structure before starting to work on the individual components of a new digital system. The true value of e-government lies in wider interoperability that provides a seamless experience for the user.
- The partnership with Estonia's eGovernance Academy allowed the Beninese government to learn from and build on European good practice in e-government interoperability frameworks, while carefully adapting it to the local context.
- The collaboration with Estonia has resulted in increasing the technical capacities of the Information Services and Systems Agency of Benin and sparked the creation of numerous further e-services.

## Challenge

Digital transformation is a central element of Benin's public sector structural reforms. However, pitfalls can be encountered with digital deployment if sufficient attention is not paid to digital governance issues. The Government of Benin turned to Estonia to learn from this small country's experience of becoming a world leader in e-government. A Memorandum of Understanding was established with the e-Governance Academy Foundation, an Estonian non-profit organisation that has helped governments all over the world set up national frameworks for going digital. The agreement included establishing a governmental interoperability solution, a national e-service portal and providing general advisory support for the implementation of smart governance (e-Governance Academy, n.d.<sup>[1]</sup>).

## Approach

The first phase of the co-operation focused on setting up the e-government architecture and related organisational framework in Benin. This included:

- establishing the interoperability framework ensuring that public sector organisations can share and reuse information for more effective public service delivery
- reviewing the legislative framework so that it corresponds to the needs of a digital society
- conducting an inventory of existing public sector information systems and databases
- training public sector officials.

In addition, a data exchange solution for public authorities (Unified eXchange Platform) was implemented (e-Governance Academy<sup>[2]</sup>) based on X-Road, the open-source technology used in Estonia (e-Estonia<sup>[3]</sup>).

In the second phase, a one-stop shop portal (Government of Benin<sup>[4]</sup>) was developed and launched enabling citizens and businesses to access public services and other relevant information. The technical solution was provided in co-operation with private sector companies: Cybernetica from Estonia and Open SI from Benin.

Throughout the process, the e-Governance Academy acted as an advisor to the Beninese government on a wide range of topics related to co-ordination and e-government structure. They also involved private sector partners for the technical implementation and practical training. Specific emphasis was placed on training activities, to increase the skills of Beninese public sector officials and guarantee the sustainability of the results.

## Results

The co-operation with Estonia has helped the Beninese government prepare for the deployment of their digital governance system. Both partners jointly developed the Beninese e-government interoperability framework, by defining the most suitable high-level e-government setup from an organisational and technical perspective. Although the interoperability framework builds on European good practice (European Commission, 2017<sup>[5]</sup>), Beninese officials and legal experts have carefully adapted it

to the local context. The partnership with Estonia has also provided practical tools for officials responsible for co-ordinating state information systems by establishing a public catalogue of available information systems, databases, registers, e-services, and assets.

Through workshops and mentoring, public officials have become more aware of the organisational, legal, and technological aspects of digital transformation and have gained specific practical skills. A high number of developers and administrators have been trained to maintain and further develop the newly introduced systems and solutions.

In addition to establishing a fully functioning public service portal that provides information on around 150 public services (including more than 25 newly developed e-services), the collaboration with Estonia has resulted in increasing the technical capacities of the Information Services and Systems Agency of Benin and sparked the creation of numerous further e-services, including publishing national exam results, electronic driver's license exams and e-voting at elections.

## Lessons learnt

### ■ **Success is underpinned by the people.**

It is essential to have a critical mass of motivated and knowledgeable people to drive digital transformation. In Benin, there has been clear direction from the President and much support from the Minister of Digital Affairs and Digitalization. Although some time and negotiations were involved, the Information Services and Systems Agency of Benin, boasts an increasing number of skilled staff, who lead and co-ordinate the everyday processes and projects.

### ■ **Establish a solid framework.**

The importance of establishing an interoperability framework prior to developing the individual components

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cannot be overstated. Where there are limited financial and human resources it is important to have a clear understanding of the context and overall governance structure before starting to work on individual elements of the e-governance structure. Although it is important both politically and for the motivation of public servants to find "quick wins" with one-off solutions, the true value of e-government lies in wider interoperability that provides a seamless experience for the user. Understanding of and support for this approach at the highest political level, is key to its success, as demonstrated in Benin.

- **Public-private partnerships.** Including the private sector in developing public e-services is needed to attract additional knowledge and capacity, and helps advance the local information and communications technology sector.

This case study is also published on the OECD's virtual peer learning platform Development Co-operation TIPS • Tools Insights Practices as part of its *In Practice* series. The series presents real life responses to a diverse range of development co-operation challenges, with a focus on results and lessons learnt.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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