



End of project report

Results & Impacts

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Digital Entrepreneurship Component
Global project "Digital Transformation"

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Lists of abbreviations

ADPME	Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency
ARCEP	Regulatory Authority for Electronic Communications and Postal Services
ASIN	Agency for Information and Digital Systems
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
DPAF	Directorate of Planning, Administration and Finance
DTC	Digital Transformation Center
D4D	Digital for Development
ESO	Ecosystem support organisation
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance
HIIG	Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society
IFC	International Finance Corporation
INSTaD	National Institute of Statistics and Demography
ITC	International Trade Center
JING	Digital Inclusion and Gender Day
MND	Ministry for Digital Affairs
MPMEPE	Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises and the Promotion of Employment
ProPME	Promotion of SMEs in Benin
SAEI	Support structures for innovative entrepreneurship
SAFEN	African Exhibition for Women in Entrepreneurship and Digital Technology
SENIA	Digital Entrepreneurship and Artificial Intelligence Conference
SENUM	Digital Week

Main messages

The German government is supporting the digital transformation of partner countries through the initiative “Digital Transformation Centers” (DTC). German development cooperation supports the implementation of the digital agenda of the Beninese Government through GIZ and the global project “Digital Transformation” which represented the “Digital Entrepreneurship” component of the DTC in Benin from September 2021 until February 2024.

Funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to the tune of 1.34 million Euros, the project “Digital Transformation” worked closely with its political partner, the Ministry for Digital Affairs of Benin, for the entire duration of the project.

The objective of the component was to strengthen Benin's digital entrepreneurship through access to data relevant to the digital sector, the creation and transfer of knowledge as well as the promotion of digital skills.

The component worked with fifty (50) partners from all sectors: Beninese public administration, entrepreneurship support organisations, the private sector, academic and professional training structures, technical and financial partners as well as international organisations.

Two essential principles were guiding the implementation of the project: the integration of entrepreneurs from the entire country and an inclusive approach to gender.

During the implementation of the project, the following concrete impacts could be achieved:

1. Beninese digital entrepreneurship is better positioned in West Africa and Europe.
2. Beninese digital start-ups have generally strengthened their skills and are able to better manage their businesses.
3. Female entrepreneurs are aware of their capabilities and the opportunities that lay within the digital sector in Benin.

The project reached 1,500 beneficiaries during offline activities, including 400 female entrepreneurs and actors from the digital sector and 100 entrepreneurs based outside Cotonou/Calavi. Furthermore, 70 companies from the local digital economy received technical and financial support for their technical and/or commercial development, including 30 scholarships for Beninese start-ups for their participation in flagship events in Benin and 20 structures having developed their technical and managerial skills during week-long training.

1. Setting the scene: The digital sector in Benin

The Government of Benin aspires to leverage information and communication technologies as a driving force for economic vitality and modernization within the country to expedite both economic growth and social inclusion. Since 2016, the Beninese government has prioritised the promotion of innovation in the private sector and digital transformation of public administration by undertaking numerous reforms to structure the digital sector and turn Benin into "the digital platform of West Africa".

As part of this, the government has created a regulatory structure that includes the establishment of several specialised institutions such as the Ministry for Digital Affairs (MND) and the Agency for Information and Digital Systems (ASIN), but also an appropriate regulatory framework for cyber security and the adoption of a Digital Code (*Code du Numérique*). In addition, specific instruments tailored to digital and innovative entrepreneurship were initiated such as a Start-up Act. Finally, recently, as one of the first African countries, Benin published its National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence and Big Data in January 2023.

The first results of the efforts by the government are already visible, such as the deployment of more than 2,000 km of fibre in only two years, the creation of a digital administration network with almost 200 interconnected sites and the construction of the national "Data Center".

Regarding the start-up sector, Benin has a small but active and dynamic digital, entrepreneurial and innovative ecosystem largely located in the economic centre in the south of the country, in Cotonou. This creative community is composed of local start-ups and entrepreneurs, ecosystem support organisations (ESO) (including incubators, FabLabs, makerspaces and co-working spaces), specialised tech and design schools, and NGOs focusing on entrepreneurship. This community is actively involved in national sector events, like the Digital Entrepreneurship and Artificial Intelligence Conference (SENIA) and the annual Digital Week (SENUM).

While recent years have seen notable advancements and positive developments within the ecosystem, Beninese entrepreneurs continue to encounter challenges and constraints. Those are associated with limited access to networking opportunities, funding and the internet in non-urban areas, gender-related disparities, the lack of specific competencies and skills, and the absence of mature ecosystem support organizations.



Image 1: A participant during a networking event for digital entrepreneurs organised by the DTC

2. The project in short

Key project information

Component	Digital Entrepreneurship
Financing	Global Project “Digital Transformation”
Programme	Digital Transformation Center
Project number	2018.2251.9-042
Principal	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Political partner	Ministry for Digital Affairs (MND)
Duration	September 2021 – February 2024
Budget	1,340,000 EURO

German development cooperation has supported the implementation of the agenda of the Ministry for Digital Affairs (MND) since 2020. This support is carried out today as part of the approach of the Digital Transformation Center (DTC) aimed at supporting the development of innovative digital ecosystems at the local level in order to support a self-determined digital transformation process in all partner countries.

The idea of the DTC in Benin is to strengthen local skills for a digital transformation based on the needs and potential of stakeholders and by applying a holistic approach for the continued development of the digital agenda of the Beninese government based on co-creation. Since its creation, the DTC in Benin has addressed three main themes: digital entrepreneurship, eGovernment and digital learning.

Funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to the tune of 1.34 million Euros, the “Digital Entrepreneurship” component of the DTC, which represents the global project “Digital Transformation”, took up its work in September 2021 and closed in February 2024. The objective of the component was to strengthen Benin's digital entrepreneurship through access to data relevant to the digital sector, the creation and transfer of knowledge as well as the promotion of digital skills.

Through a diversity of activities, the component intervened at the macro, meso and micro levels:

- **Macro level:** the component supported the Beninese public administration in monitoring the development of the digital sector and joined the government's efforts to promote Beninese digital entrepreneurship inside and outside the country.
- **Meso level:** the component targeted digital businesses from Benin and supported the identification of their needs in order to enable the government and the entire ecosystem to develop concrete and adapted support measures.
- **Micro level:** the component directly supported digital entrepreneurs from Benin by identifying them and offering networking and capacity building opportunities.

During the operational planning of the component, the program was broken down into 4 components illustrated with their key activities below.

<p>I Support for the development of the Digital Observatory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Methodological and technical support for the design and initialization of a digital data repository in Benin 	<p>II Support for the assessment of digital entrepreneurship in Benin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Study “An Overview of the Digital Ecosystem and Digital Entrepreneurship in Benin” ▪ Research collaboration with the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society on sustainable digital entrepreneurship
<p>III Support for the promotion of Beninese digital entrepreneurship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support for the “Digital Entrepreneurship and Artificial Intelligence Conference” (SENIA) in 2022 and 2023 ▪ Support for the “Digital Week” (SENUM) in 2022 and 2023 ▪ Support for the “Benin Numérique” magazine 	<p>IV Support for digital start-ups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Climate Change Innovation Competition ▪ Capacity building for digital entrepreneurs ▪ Study and immersion trips ▪ Development of a network of digital entrepreneurs ▪ “Guide for Digital Entrepreneurs” ▪ “Founders’ Guide to Fundraising in Benin”

During implementation, the component worked with a wide variety and diversity of partners including the Beninese public sector (for example the Ministry for Digital Affairs or the Agency for Information and Digital Systems), the local digital and entrepreneurial ecosystem (notably digital start-ups and entrepreneurship support organisations such as EtriLabs, Women in Tech Benin) as well as the private and academic sector (for example T-Ventures and Acumen Network or Epitech and Digital Valley, respectively). Furthermore, the project collaborated with a range of regional and international partners including VIVATECH, Metropole of Montpellier and Fondation Perspective & Innovation from France, ActivSpaces and Afreetech from Cameroon as well as the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society and Berlin Startupnight from Germany.



Image 2: Beninese entrepreneurs during the closing of the IMPULX programme implemented by Digital Valley

3. Main phases and major activities of the project

The Digital Transformation Center Benin was launched in September 2021 and started with the global project “Digital Transformation” (Digital Entrepreneurship component). After a preparatory and conceptual phase lasting until March 2022, the effective implementation of the component took place from April 2022 until the end of 2023 with a first activity kicked off already in late 2021.

The preparatory and conceptual phase from September 2021 until March 2022 focused on the development of the activity plan, in close collaboration with the Ministry for Digital Affairs as well as relevant players in the ecosystem such as ASIN, Epitech or the Digiboost project financed by the European Union and implemented by ENABEL. During this phase the component also contributed to the development of the actual structure “Digital Transformation Center” as well as to the formulation of the bilateral project Beninnovation (eGovernment component) representing the anchor project of the DTC.

The implementation of key activities of the project was validated by the political partner ahead of and during the planning workshops of the component held in March 2022 and 2023. Those activities are summarized in the following:



Image 3: Participants in discussion during a planning workshop

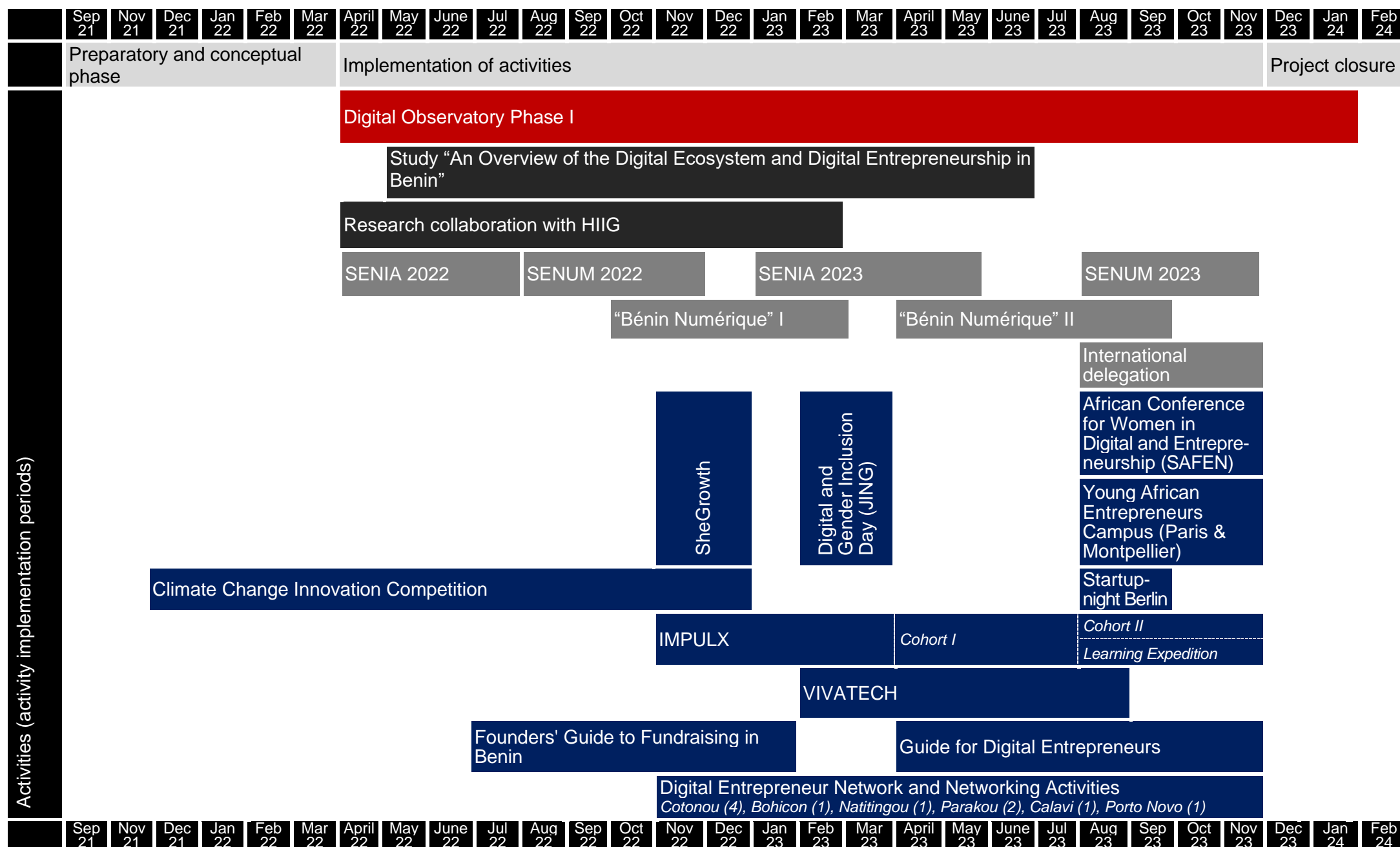


Figure 1: Main phases and major activities of the project

Table 1 below provides an overview of the major activities of the component with their objectives and outputs as well as the implementation periods (starting at the design phase), partners and sustainability approaches:

Table 1: Activities implemented by the project

Activity	Goals	Major output(s)	Implementation period & Main service providers/ partners	Sustainability approach and opportunities
Part I: Support for the Digital Observatory				
Creation of the Digital Observatory	Methodologically and technically support the design and initialization of the repository of all data relating to digital technology in Benin through the development of its architecture and the initialization of the Digital Observatory's database as well as the development of an operation's manual and a roadmap to make the required data available	<p>A benchmark analysis of information systems is carried out.</p> <p>Existing information systems are identified with the support of the DPAF of the MND, ASIN, ARCEP and INSTaD.</p> <p>The catalog of recommendations and actions resulting from a workshop from May 2018 is updated.</p> <p>A functional and agile architecture as well as the logical architecture of the Digital Observatory's data repository based on data collection and administration modules and an interconnection study are available.</p> <p>A proposed roadmap to obtain all required data is available.</p> <p>Approaches for the operationalization of the Observatory are available.</p>	<p>🕒 03/2022-01/2024</p> <p>Afreetech (Cameroon)</p>	Results of the service provider's work will be taken up by the MND and ASIN in phase II of the development of the Observatory
Component II: Support for the assessment of digital entrepreneurship in Benin				
Research collaboration with the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG) on sustainable digital entrepreneurship	Support GIZ headquarters in carrying out the project "Sustainability, Entrepreneurship and Global Digital Transformation" implemented by HIIG with a component in Benin to generate knowledge on sustainable digital entrepreneurship and innovation in Benin.	<p>The exploratory empirical study "Towards sustainable digital entrepreneurship in Benin and French-speaking West and Central Africa" is available.</p> <p>A multi-stakeholder dialogue on sustainable digital entrepreneurship in Benin and West Africa took place.</p> <p>A keynote and a panel discussion were held as part of SENIA 2022.</p> <p>The episode "Exploring Benin's rising digital economy" as part of the "Exploring Digital Spheres" podcast is produced by HIIG.</p>	<p>🕒 04/2022-02/2023</p> <p>HIIG (Germany)</p>	<p>Digital version of the empirical study is available on the HIIG website</p> <p>The episode "Exploring Benin's rising digital economy" as part of the "Exploring Digital Spheres" podcast by HIIG is available on Spotify</p>
Completion of the study "An Overview of the Digital Ecosystem and Digital Entrepreneurship in Benin"	Create an understanding of major developments in the digital sector, the digital ecosystem and digital entrepreneurship and provide an analysis allowing the assessment of the maturity of the sector and digital entrepreneurship in Benin	The study "An Overview of the Digital Ecosystem and Digital Entrepreneurship in Benin" is available in a digital format and print-out evaluating the major developments in the digital sector, the digital ecosystem and digital entrepreneurship, based on more than 100 surveys, ca. thirty expert interviews and three workshops carried out with ecosystem players.	<p>🕒 04/2022-06/2023</p> <p><i>Conceptional phase:</i> University of Oxford</p> <p><i>Written by:</i> ACED & Acumen Network</p> <p><i>Launch:</i> Sèmè City</p>	The digital version of the study is available on the MND website

Activity	Goals	Major output(s)	Implementation period & Main service providers/ partners	Sustainability approach and opportunities
Component III: Support for the promotion of Beninese digital entrepreneurship				
Digital Entrepreneurship and Artificial Intelligence Conference (SENIA) 2022	Provide financial support and advisory support to the political partner to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and raise awareness about new technologies, local tech solutions and Beninese digital entrepreneurship, Support capacity building for digital entrepreneurs and 	Scholarships for five digital start-ups covering the booths and travel costs have been funded. The trip of an international speaker was organized and expenses covered. A keynote by HIIG has been facilitated. A panel discussion on AI has been facilitated. Materials for promoting SENIA have been funded.	🕒 04-07/2022 Optimum Solutions	
SENIA 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the promotion of Beninese start-ups and local digital entrepreneurship. 	A financing contract with the MND for the organization of SENIA 2023 was concluded.	🕒 01-05/2023 Optimum Solutions	
Digital Week (SENUM) 2022	Provide financial and advisory support to the political partner to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and raise awareness among the population about digital technology and Benin's digital policy, Support capacity building for digital entrepreneurs and Position Benin as a main digital hub in the region and in Africa. 	A call for applications targeting digital start-ups to participate in SENUM 2022 took place in Benin. Scholarships for twelve digital start-ups covering booths and travel costs have been funded. A business lunch was financed allowing around forty Beninese entrepreneurs to establish business relationships with senior government officials and other relevant stakeholders in Benin. A partnership with the D4D Hub is concluded for the financing and implementation of additional activities for SENUM 2022. Two panel discussions, two masterclasses and a talkshow were organized on relevant methods and tools for digital entrepreneurs, allowing nearly 400 actors from the digital ecosystem to strengthen their understanding of fundraising, UI/UX processes and the potential of FemTech solutions etc. The event has been transmitted online.	🕒 08-11/2022 Carré Design Blolab D4D Hub (European Union) Local individual consultant	Continued support for key government events possible by Beninnovation
SENUM 2023		A call for applications targeting Beninese digital start-ups to participate in SENUM 2023 has taken place. Eleven stands for local start-ups were financed. An International Pavilion has been created (see <i>International Delegation for SENUM 2023</i>). A keynote on the digital ecosystem and digital entrepreneurship based on the in-depth research carried out	🕒 08-1 1/2023 Carré Design Mstudio (Ivory Coast) Flat6Labs (Tunisia)	

Activity	Goals	Major output(s)	Implementation period & Main service providers/ partners	Sustainability approach and opportunities
		<p>for the study “An Overview of the Digital Ecosystem and Digital Entrepreneurship in Benin” was held.</p> <p>The “Guide for Digital Entrepreneurs” offering a set of tools, paths, approaches and information essential to any entrepreneur in Benin has been presented.</p> <p>A masterclass on fundraising to help entrepreneurs understand the expectations and needs of investors and Business Angels is carried out.</p> <p>A workshop on partnership opportunities in West Africa has been held.</p> <p>Demo sessions with foreign start-ups took place (see <i>International delegation for SENUM 2023</i>).</p> <p>The “Pitch and Connect” event took place, allowing digital start-ups to develop their expertise in pitching.</p> <p>The trip of two international speakers was organized and expenses covered (see <i>African Conference for Women in Entrepreneurship and Digital Technology (SAFEN)</i>).</p> <p>Workshops on the agile method have been hosted (see <i>SAFEN</i>).</p> <p>SENUM 2023 was transmitted online and the recordings of the sessions are available online.</p>	<p>International Trade Center (ITC) (United Nations/World Bank)</p> <p>International Finance Corporation (IFC) (World Bank)</p>	
International delegation for SENUM 2023	Mobilize the network of African Digital Transformation Centers and GIZ as well as the International Trade Center (ITC) to bring digital start-ups considering an expansion into West Africa and Benin together to create synergies and facilitate active south-south cooperation.	<p>A call for applications in the sub-region (Morocco, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Togo, Cameroon) to identify 7 African start-ups with an interest in developing their businesses in Benin took place.</p> <p>The first International Pavilion is created serving as a powerful tool for promoting Benin and helping to position the country on the map of West African entrepreneurial ecosystems.</p> <p>A collaboration with ITC for the financing of two African start-ups from the ITC network has been agreed.</p> <p>An international delegation made up of 7 African start-ups participated in SENUM 2023.</p>	<p>🕒 08-11/2023</p> <p>ITC (United Nations/World Bank)</p> <p>DTC and/or GIZ office in Morocco, Cameroon, Senegal, Togo and Ivory Coast</p>	

Activity	Goals	Major output(s)	Implementation period & Main service providers/ partners	Sustainability approach and opportunities
Support for the “Benin Numérique” magazine	Highlight relevant actions carried out in the Beninese digital sector through financial support for the first editions of the magazine “Bénin Numérique”	The first two editions of the magazine are available in both digital and physical format.	🕒 <i>First edition:</i> 10/2022-02/2023 🕒 <i>Second edition:</i> 04-09/2023 Local consultant	Digital versions of the first and second edition are available on the MND website
Component IV: Support for digital start-ups				
Climate Change Innovation Competition	<p>Support GIZ headquarters with the implementation of an innovation competition on climate change in Benin, Niger and Cameroon in order to promote</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The growth of Beninese digital start-ups and the strengthening of Beninese entrepreneurs through a long-term mentoring programme and ▪ Networking of entrepreneurs with important institutional and entrepreneurial actors in Central Africa through their participation in the Digital Innovation Festival in Douala. 	Three Beninese AgriTech and GreenTech start-ups strengthened their capacities, developed sub-regional networks and promoted their activities during a study trip abroad funded by the project.	🕒 12/2021-12/2022 VC4A (Netherlands) EtriLabs ActivSpaces (Cameroon) CIPMEN (Niger)	
Development of the “Founders’ Guide to fundraising in Benin”	Support the Make-IT in Africa initiative (GIZ) in the drafting of a methodological guide on fundraising	The work on the “Founders’ Guide to Fundraising in Benin” has been supported and the document is available online.	🕒 06/2022-01/2023 Make-IT in Africa (GIZ) Briter Bridges (UK) Local consultant	Digital version of the guide available on the Make-IT in Africa website
Development of the “Guide for Digital Entrepreneurs”	Provide local entrepreneurs with a reference document for the development and growth of their start-up through the creation of an explanatory and support guide emphasizing crucial elements for success such as skills, key roles, fundraising etc.	The “Guide for Digital Entrepreneurs” is available in digital and physical format, taking into consideration the needs of digital entrepreneurs.	🕒 04-11/2023 T-Ventures	Digital version of the Guide available on the MND website

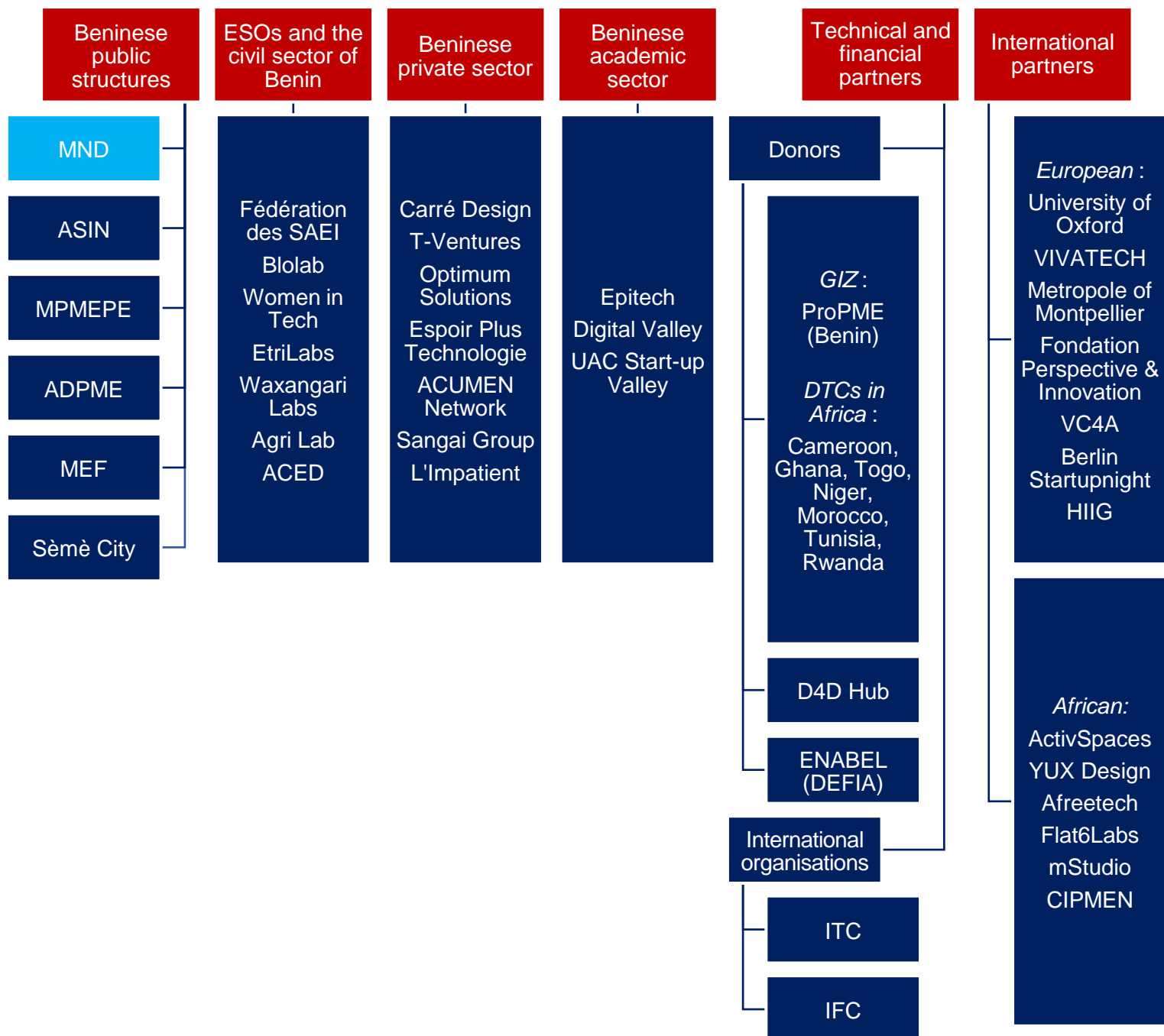
SheGrowth	<p>Support the Women in Tech SheGrowth programme through the organization of a 4-day bootcamp for female digital entrepreneurs with the objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To support the growth and performance of digital companies led or co-founded by women, ▪ To improve the understanding by female entrepreneurs how to build lasting solutions and ▪ To respond to the obstacles hindering the development of digital businesses led by women by providing them with comprehensive technical support 	A 4-day bootcamp on business development and agile methods with ca. 50 women was organised in Porto Novo.	🕒 11-12/2022	<p>Women in Tech Federation of SAEI Digital Women Heroes Community</p>	Continued support for Women in Tech through Beninnovation
African Conference for Women in Entrepreneurship and Digital Technology (SAFEN)	<p>Technically and financially support the implementation of the first edition of SAFEN alongside SENUM 2023 in Benin in order to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strengthen the capacities of women in the fields of innovation and agile methods, ▪ Encourage the exchange of knowledge, experiences and good practices among female entrepreneurs and ▪ Recognize the work and commitment of women active in the entrepreneurship and digital sector in Benin. 	<p>The first edition of SAFEN took place in November 2023 alongside SENUM 2023, allowing more than 120 participants to improve their understanding of digital topics and capitalize on shared experiences.</p> <p>An award ceremony highlighting and distinguishing female Beninese role models in the sector took place.</p> <p>A series of workshops on the agile method aimed particularly at women in the sector in order to highlight diversity has taken place during SENUM 2023.</p> <p>The trip of an international speaker was organized and expenses covered.</p>	🕒 08-11/2023	Women in Tech	
Study and immersion trip to VIVATECH	Organize a study, promotion and immersion trip to VIVATECH 2023 for Beninese digital entrepreneurs and public administration representatives in order to promote Beninese digital entrepreneurship abroad and provide support for the improvement of relevant events organized in Benin in the sub-sector	<p>A call for applications to identify seven Beninese entrepreneurs took place.</p> <p>Seven Beninese entrepreneurs participated in a capacity building and prep programme led by a Beninese consultant ahead of the trip.</p> <p>A collaboration with ENABEL for the financing of two additional start-ups has been agreed.</p> <p>Nine entrepreneurs from Benin promoted their solutions at VIVATECH and benefited from international exposure thanks to their immersion in the Paris ecosystem.</p>	🕒 03-09/2023	<p>VIVATECH (France) ENABEL (DEFIA) (Belgium) Local consultant</p>	Request to finance a Beninese delegation and a stand at GITEX in Morocco in May 2024 by the political partner. Financial and technical support agreed by the DTC.

		<p>Two representatives of the Beninese administration were able to explore possibilities to improve events organized in Benin in the sub-sector.</p> <p>A panel on digital entrepreneurship in Benin took place during VIVATECH, contributing to the positioning of the ecosystem abroad.</p> <p>The trip of Beninese entrepreneurs was covered by media outlets such as CIO Mag and No Limit Africa.</p>		
Participation in the Young African Entrepreneurs Campus	Facilitate a trip to Paris and Montpellier for Beninese entrepreneurs thanks to a partnership with Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole and the Prospective & Innovation Foundation as part of the Young African Entrepreneurs Campus and the Europe-Africa Biennale, allowing those entrepreneurs to meet investors, attend masterclasses, immerse themselves in a company in their sector and participate in pitch and networking events	<p>A call for applications to identify two Beninese entrepreneurs took place.</p> <p>Two Beninese entrepreneurs joined a delegation made up of fifteen African entrepreneurs to participate in the Young African Entrepreneurs Campus and the Europe-Africa Biennale.</p>	<p>🕒 08-11/2023</p> <p>Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole (France)</p> <p>Perspective & Innovation Foundation (France)</p>	Matchmaking of contacts from Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole and Perspective & Innovation Foundation with other GIZ projects in Benin
Creation of a network of digital entrepreneurs in Benin	Propose a support framework for the creation of a network of digital entrepreneurs through the organization of information and networking activities on digital entrepreneurship in four municipalities	<p>Ten events on various topics were organized in the entire country, including four in Cotonou, two in Parakou and one in Bohicon, Natitingou, Calavi and Porto Novo.</p> <p>A Whatsapp group for network members has been created.</p>	<p>🕒 11/2022-11/2023</p> <p>Carré Design</p> <p>T-Ventures</p> <p>Sangai Group</p> <p>L'Impatient</p>	<p>A Whatsapp group is accessible to network members beyond the end of the project</p> <p>Integration of the network into the Tech 229 Community launched in January 2024</p> <p>Experience sharing session with the initiators of the Tech 229 Community</p>

IMPULX	Develop and implement a pilot programme to strengthen the capacities of digital entrepreneurs and their teams as well as of members of the Beninese public administration through the creation of certifying training modules to accelerate the development of skills of programme participants, and assess the capacity of stakeholders of the ecosystem to self-finance these modules	Two cohorts with ten start-ups each and 18 start-ups in total have strengthened their capacities. <i>A Learning Expedition</i> (a discovery and immersion programme within the digital entrepreneurship ecosystem) took place for representatives of the Beninese public sector.	🕒 11/2022-11/2023 Digital Valley YUX Design (Senegal)	A session to present results and share experiences with relevant ecosystem stakeholders and potential actors to continue the programme took place in November 2023
Organization of the Digital and Gender Inclusion Day (JING)	In collaboration with all DTC Benin components, organize the first edition of JING with various activities (hackathon, training, multi-stakeholder dialogue) to contribute to the improvement of female representation in the digital sector	A hackathon is co-organized with the other DTC components, leading to the creation of digital solutions addressing women and people with specific needs. A multi-stakeholder dialogue addressed the gap between men and women in the digital sector and proposed approaches for inclusion.	🕒 02-03/2023 ACED	JING will be continued within the framework of the DTC

4. Mobilization and commitment of partners

In close collaboration with the political partner, the component worked with a rich diversity of partners (approximately 50) from all sectors for the implementation of activities: Beninese public administration, ecosystem support organisations (ESO), the private sector, academic organisations and structures focusing on professional training, technical and financial partners and a variety of international structures.



In addition to these structures, the project recruited around ten individual consultants to support activities.

Since the start of the project and thanks to various actions and activities to promote Benin's efforts in digital transformation among international structures and within GIZ, additional support activities were identified and implemented.

These include the following:

Activity	Summary
Collaboration with the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG) on sustainable digital entrepreneurship	See above Support the HIIG-GIZ (Germany) project carrying out an exploratory empirical study on sustainable digital entrepreneurship
Climate Change Innovation Competition	See above Inclusion of Benin into a support programme addressing West African entrepreneurs financed by GIZ (Germany)
Development of the Founders' Guide for Fundraising in Benin	See above Support the regional Make-IT in Africa initiative (GIZ) in the drafting of a methodological guide on fundraising
Collaboration with Oxford University for the design phase of a study	Internal support for the design phase of a project to assess and evaluate the digital and entrepreneurial ecosystem in Benin enabled as part of a financing contract between GIZ (Germany) and the University of Oxford
D4D Hub	Collaboration with the Digital for Development (D4D) Hub, a strategic platform established by the European Union and its Member States, for the financing and implementation of activities during Digital Week 2022
Berlin Startupnight	Integration of a Beninese entrepreneur into an African delegation during the Berlin Startupnight; travel costs covered by BMZ
International Trade Center (ITC)	Collaboration during SENUM 2023 through the co-financing of an activity and coverage of travel expenses for two African start-ups participating in the international delegation as part of SENUM 2023
Sèmè City Development Agency	Establishing contact between the regional Make-IT in Africa initiative (GIZ) and Sèmè City, and assist Sèmè City in their application for the GIZ GreenTech Hub programme (capacity building programme for accelerators specialized in GreenTec) which led to Sèmè City being selected

5. Private sector beneficiaries

The main beneficiaries of the project were digital start-ups¹ meaning young companies for which digital solutions constitute an essential element of their business plan. This understanding of “digital start-ups” is aligned with the objectives of the global project “Digital Transformation” with which the component is associated. Given the limits of the project (budget, duration), the digitalization of “classic” companies through the use of for example digital tools for management activities or production processes was not addressed as a main objective during the implementation of the component. However, the component worked in close collaboration with the “Promotion of SMEs in Benin” project (ProPME), whose output 1 aims to strengthen the capacities of SMEs in general, with a particular focus on digital capacities.

The project highlighted two essential principles in the implementation of the project:

- Integration of entrepreneurs from the entire country
- Adoption of a gender-inclusive approach

The project has actively organized activities outside Cotonou, notably in Bohicon, Natitingou, Parakou, Calavi and Porto Novo. In order to promote digital entrepreneurship in the whole country, the project also financed scholarships to allow start-ups based outside the innovation hub in the south to participate in flagship events in Cotonou. In addition to this, the component facilitated the online transmission of events such as SENUM and SAFEN, allowing innovative structures to follow the various interventions throughout Benin.



Image 4: Intervention by a participant during JING 2023

¹Decree No. 2023 – 095 of March 2 2023 relating to the modalities for granting the start-up label to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and the related rights and obligations defines a start-up as a “young innovative company with strong potential for development. These are companies whose economic model largely integrates digital and/or innovative solutions for solving society’s problems. They operate in the sector of new technologies, often on the internet.”



Image 5: Launch of SAFEN

As women are underrepresented in the field of digital entrepreneurship, the component financed four flagship activities addressing gender issues and women directly:

- Collaboration with Women in Tech Benin for the SheGrowth programme through the organization of a 4-day bootcamp,
- Co-financing and co-organisation of the first Digital and Gender Inclusion Day (JING),
- Organisation of a networking activity on “Women in digital: opportunities and funding” as well as
- Financing and organizational support for the first edition of SAFEN.

In terms of the number of people and start-ups in the digital sector reached through the various project interventions, we can see the following results:

1,500 people and 70 businesses from the local digital economy were reached through 50 offline activities aimed at strengthening their competitiveness

400 female entrepreneurs or actors in the digital sector during four interventions aimed at women and gender

100 entrepreneurs and those interested in the digital sector based outside of Cotonou/Calavi participated in activities organised exclusively for them in their cities.

30 digital start-ups or associated structures have benefited from at least one scholarship to participate in a flagship event in the sector, including 8 with headquarters outside the Cotonou/Calavi area

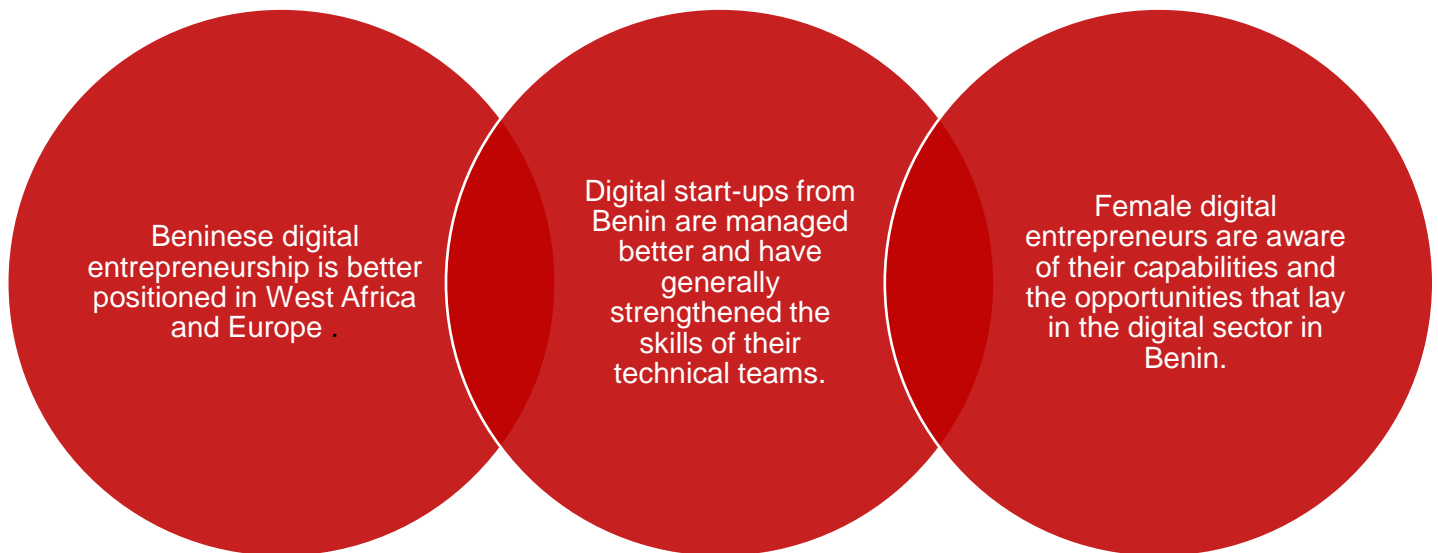
20 Beninese digital start-ups participated in structured capacity building programmes lasting several weeks

4,500 digital entrepreneurs and those interested in the sector have been informed about and equipped with innovative approaches and methods thanks to the Guide for Digital Entrepreneurs.

6. Impacts and results of the project's interventions and activities

For two and a half years, the component aimed to strengthen digital entrepreneurship in Benin through access to data relevant to the digital sector, the creation and transfer of knowledge as well as the promotion of digital skills.

During this time, the following impacts were achieved:



From September 2021 until February 2024 the different project activities achieved various results:

- The conception of the Digital Observatory ultimately makes it possible to position Benin as a key player in innovation policy in Africa by facilitating access to reliable data, allowing a realistic assessment of the progress of the digital sector and hence informed decision-making by public and private actors.
- An exploratory empirical study on sustainable digital entrepreneurship in Benin, carried out in partnership with a German scientific institution, puts Benin on the map of the international digital sector and promotes the country as an emerging player in innovation.
- The first in-depth study focusing on the current state of the digital ecosystem and the maturity of digital entrepreneurship in Benin provides precise and accessible information to decision-makers in Benin, the region and abroad, enabling an improved understanding of the realities that Beninese entrepreneurs face and that are prevalent in the local digital ecosystem, therefore contributing to informed decision-making and the development of strategic actions for a sustainable continued progress of the sector.
- Through offline activities focusing on digital entrepreneurship and Beninese digital policy such as IMPULX, the development of a network of digital entrepreneurs or SAFEN, 1,500 people and 70 companies from the local digital economy were assisted and supported in order to strengthen their competitiveness.
- The ecosystem actors (digital entrepreneurs and representatives of the public sector) who participated in five immersion trips to France (2), Cameroon, Germany and Rwanda promoted the progress of the Beninese digital sector abroad and positioned Benin as a key player in innovation policy in Africa.

- Thanks to three structured immersion trips abroad, thirteen Beninese start-ups managed to expand their networks beyond the national ecosystem, therefore creating new strategic opportunities which led to the conclusion of new partnerships.
- Thirty Beninese digital start-ups benefited from at least one scholarship for a stand/booth at a flagship event of the digital sector organized by the government in Benin. This allowed them to promote their offerings, enter new strategic partnerships and identify new users and customers. This opportunity had a notable impact on strengthening visibility and business opportunities for these start-ups in the digital space.
- Twenty Beninese digital start-ups developed their technical and managerial skills during structured several week-long capacity building programmes, equipping them with innovative and modern approaches and methods. These training courses played a key role for their fundraising success and international expansion, for receiving awards at events in other African ecosystems as well as for concluding grant agreements, etc. thus allowing those start-ups significant advances in the development and success of their structures.
- One hundred (100) entrepreneurs and individuals interested in the digital sector based outside the innovation hub Cotonou/Calavi developed their understanding of digital policy and entrepreneurship in Benin thanks to relevant activities organised in their region.
- The Guide for Digital Entrepreneurs equipped 4,500 entrepreneurs and individuals interested in the digital sector with innovative and modern approaches and methods.
- Four hundred (400) female entrepreneurs or actors from the digital sector improved their skills, developed their networks and capacities and/or adopted new strategies thanks to four flagship activities addressing gender issues and women, thereby strengthening the role of women in tech and promoting gender equality and diversity within the sector.



Image 6: Participants at the launch of the first IMPULX cohort



Image 7: The Beninese delegation at VIVATECH 2023

- The understanding of digital entrepreneurship by actors of the public sector is enhanced through activities such as VIVATECH and the IMPULX Learning Expedition, promoting a deep awareness and understanding of the realities of the sector, enabling informed decision-making and thereby creating a more responsive and supportive regulatory environment.
- The participation of a structured delegation in VIVATECH not only made it possible to position Benin on the international tech scene, it also reinforced the understanding in the country and the public sector regarding the relevance of those delegation trips for local tech start-ups.
- Eleven African start-ups and other private sector structures (such as investment funds, consulting firms) from seven African countries (Senegal, Morocco, Ghana, Togo, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Tunisia) immersed themselves in the Beninese entrepreneurial ecosystem by exchanging and creating relationships with their Beninese counterparts which led to an improved visibility of Benin in the visitor's ecosystem.
- The demystification of digital entrepreneurship through awareness-raising activities addressing innovative working methods, new technologies, gender and the realities of the digital sector in Benin facilitated the challenging and removal of existing prejudices and stereotypes and allowed for a better understanding of the field, thereby increasing participation and engagement in the digital sector.
- Beninese digital entrepreneurs have developed synergies and collaborations among themselves thanks to the networking activities organized by the component. More than twenty entrepreneurs confirmed to have improved their networking capacities and/or developed partnerships by participating in the component's activities.
- 8,000 people were informed about developments in Benin's digital and entrepreneurial sector through the DTC's digital communication channels, allowing them to seize opportunities for the development of their activity.

- At least two cooperation frameworks between institutional actors have been implemented thanks to matchmaking actions initiated by the component (D4D Hub and MND during SENUM 2022; Sèmè City and Make -IT in Africa (GIZ)).
- Several actors of the ecosystem have confirmed that they have a better understanding of the needs for innovative and targeted networking events in the ecosystem and a number of digital entrepreneurs have confirmed the added value provided by the networking activities initiated by the component such as the speed meetings (using a speed-dating format) and the afterwork pitch sessions.



Image 8: Benin's Minister for Digital Affairs, Aurelie I. ADAM SOULE ZOUMAROU, at the International Pavilion during SENUM 2023

7. Lessons learned

Digital start-ups

It is essential to regularly and carefully evaluate developments in the digital sector and the specific needs of Beninese start-ups to adequately adapt the programmes and initiatives dedicated to them, including capacity building activities, skills development trainings or programmes contributing to the visibility of the sector, ecosystem and its actors. It is recommended to rely on studies such as the one developed by GIZ as part of this project and financed by the German government. Through the identification of existing gaps, support activities can be redesigned to be accessible and relevant, focusing on key aspects that are vital for entrepreneurs.

The project noted a significant number of applications for the various activities from structures that were indeed ineligible. This implies both a general need for support activities from Beninese SMEs and also a lack of common understanding of what a start-up or a digital company actually is as well as of the different growth or maturity phases. As part of the conceptional work done in preparation of the study "An Overview of the Digital Ecosystem and Digital Entrepreneurship in Benin", a digital company was defined as:

“a company offering digital products and services or that uses digital technologies (web and/or mobile applications, online databases, connected objects or even simpler technologies such as SMS, radio, etc.) as part of a digital solution that has been developed or is in development with the aim of satisfying a need, or offering goods and services”.

According to this definition, any (highly) digitalized company which does not offer this digitalization as a service will be excluded such as, for example, a logistics company relying on external software for more efficient internal management processes unlike a company that offers this digitalized fleet as a service.



Image 9: A Beninese entrepreneur at his stand financed by GIZ during SENIA 2022

National and international trade fairs and conferences

Regarding the improvement of national trade fairs and conferences relevant for digital entrepreneurs, the following points were suggested by participants having attended these events during the project duration:

- Define and communicate the theme of the event sufficiently in advance
- Organize editions of SENUM outside Cotonou which will bring together a greater number of start-ups from within the country and allow for better inclusion
- Offer the opportunity to start-ups to suggest panels and event themes
- Communicate more on the flagship events in order to better reach start-ups inside the country
- Provide badges or a distinctive element to scholarship recipients during flagship events of the government
- Plan panels and inventions at key government events that take into consideration diversity and gender

The participation of a Beninese delegation in an international tech conference in Paris (VIVATECH) made it possible to promote Beninese tech abroad. Having developed a good and open working relationship with the VIVATECH organising team allowed for more visibility of the delegation without additional costs through the organisation of a panel discussion on the digital sector in Benin. In the future, a more prominent participation of the Beninese delegation at another international tech fair would be desirable, for example by financing a booth which at the same time also requires more preparation and resources.

Start-up support programs

According to a Digital Valley survey carried out as part of the implementation of the IMPULX capacity building programme, 89% of Beninese start-ups are not ready to pay for training programmes, citing as main reasons the non-existence of a training budget and financial difficulties. This is also reflected in the results of a survey² conducted by the component in which almost 70% of participants expressed a need for free training. For ESOs and training providers this has implications for the development of their business models which already rely heavily on cooperation with donors and technical and financial partners.

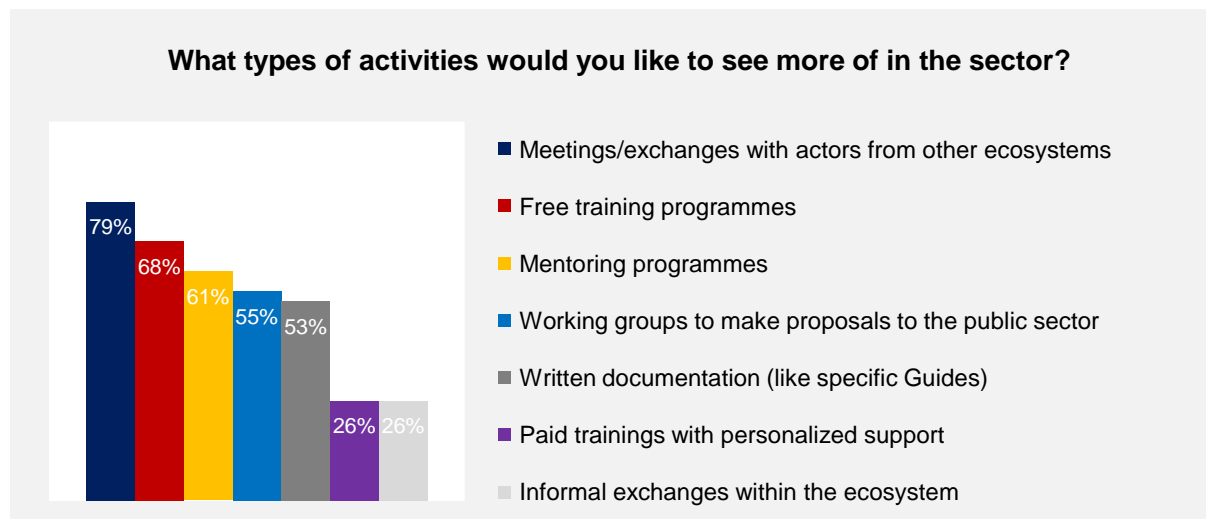


Figure 2: Results of an online survey conducted among 40 Beninese entrepreneurs

According to Digital Valley, the best solution to make programmes like IMPULX sustainable is a combination of several approaches:

- Commitment of the Agency for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises (ADPME)
- Involvement of incubators and acceleration programmes
- Development of acceleration programmes with international organizations
- Updating of existing training offers on the market
- Capacity building programmes led by technical and financial partners

² Results of an online survey among 40 Beninese entrepreneurs conducted by the component from December 2023 until January 2024

Other points to raise for the development of relevant support programmes for digital start-ups are summarized below:

- Incorporate sessions dedicated to pitching, effective communication and presentations in front of potential investors would be beneficial in helping start-ups refine their message and attract funding.
- Offer mentoring programmes bringing together experienced entrepreneurs and emerging start-ups to share knowledge, offer advice and foster faster growth (see also Figure 2).
- Facilitate access to suitable financing programmes for start-ups as well as technical resources, such as laboratories, co-working spaces and cutting-edge technologies.
- Create long(er)-term support programmes to ensure the proper assimilation of concepts and approaches by entrepreneurs (For example, participants of the IMPULX programme would have desired a longer programme duration.)
- Focus on practical training sessions, hands-on capacity building and direct thematic exchanges. All participants (and their teams) from both IMPULX cohorts appreciated the practical sessions that were identified as those with the most added value.



Image 10: Participants at the launch of the ecosystem study

Relevant themes for entrepreneurs

The study “An Overview of the Digital Ecosystem and Digital Entrepreneurship in Benin” carried out by the Beninese organizations Acumen Network and ACED found that the skills gap in Benin is particularly pronounced in the areas of programming, advanced technologies, design, business development and digital project management.

This was confirmed by those entrepreneurs who participated in a survey as part of the closure of the project (see Figure 3). Generally, the need for support is expressed in a variety of areas like working methods such as agile, innovation processes (for instance Design Thinking) or even the development of a business plan. Topics like fundraising and business financing, new technologies but also networking are considered as very important. Other areas identified are business English and relevant regulation (e.g. the Digital Code).

In which areas would you like to see more support offerings?

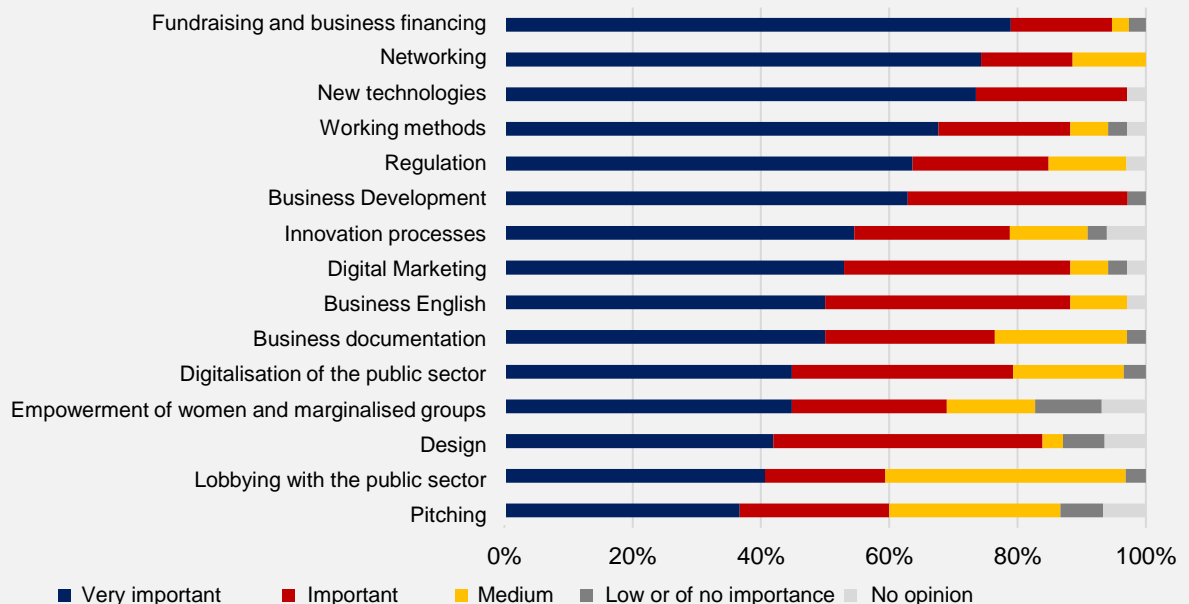


Figure 3: Results of an online survey conducted among 40 Beninese entrepreneurs

It should be noted that the need for support was expressed as "very necessary" or necessary by at least 60% of respondents for all areas listed in Figure 2, with the exception of lobbying activities with the public sector. This can be explained by the fact that the public sector is not viewed as a key actor for the development of commercial activities by the entrepreneurs who have taken part in the survey. Contrary to this, 55% of survey participants see added value in working groups to make proposals to the public sector (see Figure 2), however, this concerns the development of the sector and digital entrepreneurship in Benin as a whole and not individual commercial endeavours.

The high importance of pitches for entrepreneurs is not reflected in the survey results. This may be explained by the great need of entrepreneurs for almost anything fundraising related and their limited understanding of the methods and the communication tools necessary for a successful fundraising which includes pitches.





Image 11: The DTC Benin team with the Director of the West Africa Department 2 of GIZ, Kirsten FOCKEN, and the Resident Director of GIZ Benin, André RÖNNE

ANNEX

Appendix 1: Overview of start-ups that participated in activities of the component

Name of the structure	HQ outside Cotonou/ Calavi	Sector	VC4A Competition 2022	SENIA 2022 2022	SENUM 2022 2022	SENIA 2023 2023	IMPULX I 2023	VIVATECH 2023	IMPULX II 2023	Montpellier 2023	Berlin Startupnight 2023	SENUM 2023 2023	# of support
AFRICEREAL		AgriTech	X	X	12	9	10	7	10	2	1	11	3
AGRICONNECT AFRICA	X	AgriTech			X								1
AGROSFER		AgriTech							X		X		2
AGS AVODJEKPON GLOBAL SOLUTIONS	X	AgriTech	X	X									2
AHIYOYO		Logistics			X		X		X			X	4
AI WIZARD		Digital Inclusion				X							1
ARTICOIN		e -Commerce					X						1
BFT Group		FinTech										X	1
BIOLIFE TECH		AgriTech							X	X			2
BOOKCONEKT		e -Commerce				X		X	X				3
CASHLESS		FinTech							X				1
DIGITAL FARMER	X	AgriTech			X							X	2
DINGASTREAM		Streaming							X				1
FEDAPAY		FinTech		X		X	X	X				X	5
EH DIGITAL FARM	X	E-commerce / AgriTech			X								1
Go MEDICAL		HealthTech										X	1
H4-SERVICES		GreenTech			X								1
HOQ		e -Commerce			X								1
INAWO		CRM							X			X	2
IWO		FinTech							X			X	2
MAAM-TEC	X	Services			X								1
MARA ACADEMY		EdTech				X		X					2
MEDOM		HealthTech					X		X	X		X	4
NERDX DIGITAL		SAAS/ GreenTech			X								1
OPEN IF (KKiaPay)		Fintech		X									1
Our Voice	X	AgriTech										X	1
PERFECTO		FinTech				X	X						2
PHARMAP		HealthTech						X					1
RAYNIS (Rmobility)		Logistics			X	X	X	X					4
DEVELOPER		EdTech							X			X	2
SOULGHI LABS	X	SAAS			X								1
ICT AGRO BUSINESS	X	AgriTech	X	X	X								3
TOJUMI		HealthTech					X						1
OPTIMIZED		HR				X	X	X					3
WOMEN IN TECH		Digital Inclusion										X	1
WIZARD MAFIA		Digital Inclusion				X							1
YLOMI		Services			X	X		X					3
YPADA		E-Commerce					X						1



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