

Cities Alliance Innovation Programme

The Secure Tenure in African Cities initiative:
Micro Funds for Community Innovation

Cities Alliance

Cities Without Slums



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- Partner: **Municipality of Cocody, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire**
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eServices Techniques

An open-source software application that speeds up the issuance of permits for the occupation of public space for informal vendors and small businesses in Côte d'Ivoire

PROJECT UPDATE

Project overview

What is the problem?

Municipalities oversee the issuance of permits to informal vendors and small businesses for the occupation of public space in Côte d'Ivoire. The permit process is slow and can take up to 8 weeks. Without a permit, occupying public spaces is illegal, and users risk eviction at any moment. As a result, vendors and businesses may refrain from investing in improvements to their market stalls.

Where does it occur?

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Who does it affect?

This problem primarily affects informal vendors and small businesses, particularly women, who represent around 60% of the informal traders in Abidjan and in the country in general.

What are the causes?

Municipal technical services offices are understaffed. This causes delays because municipal agents must make site visits to check the physical space for each permit application, and applicants must make in-person visits to the municipal office. These steps make the process cumbersome, as well as expensive for vendors and businesses.

Approach

The open-source web application, eServices Techniques, is free for municipalities that want to digitize processes for obtaining and renewing occupancy permits.

The overall aim of this tech solution is to facilitate access for informal vendors and small businesses to public spaces in the Municipality of Cocody (part of Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire) and promote a more diverse and inclusive use of these spaces, thus contributing to livelihoods, especially of poor inhabitants.

The eServices Techniques web application offers a comprehensive set of features modeled after the existing process for obtaining a permit to use public spaces for commerce. The web application is intended to greatly reduce the processing time required to obtain a permit—from 8 weeks to just 14 days.

During the pilot stage, as many as 200 informal street vendors and small businesses are expected to benefit from the eServices Techniques web application.

Achievements so far

An alpha version of the eServices Techniques [web application](#) has been developed, along with a demonstration video of this tech solution in action.

Key functionalities of the web application are modeled after the existing steps in the process to obtain a permit: the application allows a vendor to apply for a permit online and schedule an appointment date for a municipal technical services agent to visit the desired public space site. The application also enables municipal technical services agents to write up their reports. The vendor can also receive a pending permit confirmation through the web application, as well as make a fee payment by mobile money or other means.

The eServices Techniques web application represents the first digital and open-source tech solution of this kind in Côte d'Ivoire.

Lessons learned

The eServices Techniques team spent nearly 6 weeks as an immersion period visiting technical services departments of several municipalities in Côte d'Ivoire and informal vendors who trade in public spaces. This allowed the team to capture the entire permitting process, including the pain points experienced by informal vendors related to the obtention of permits.

The team utilised this learning to develop the main useful functionalities of the web application.

Given the varying levels of literacy among vendors, the eServices Techniques team has also designed a simplified and user-friendly interface.

Moving forward

The deployment of a 3-month pilot project in partnership with the technical services department of the municipality of Cocody will occur next.

The eServices Techniques team will equip four technical services agents from one municipality with mobile devices and the application, while small businesses and informal vendors will have access to the application website (including an explanatory video on how to use it) to make permit requests.

The constant engagement with the municipal technical services department and the learnings acquired during this test phase will help the eServices Techniques team refine and add new functionalities to the web application.

Ultimately, the aim of eServices Techniques is to greatly reduce processing time—from 8 weeks to 14 days—for obtaining a permit to use public spaces.

