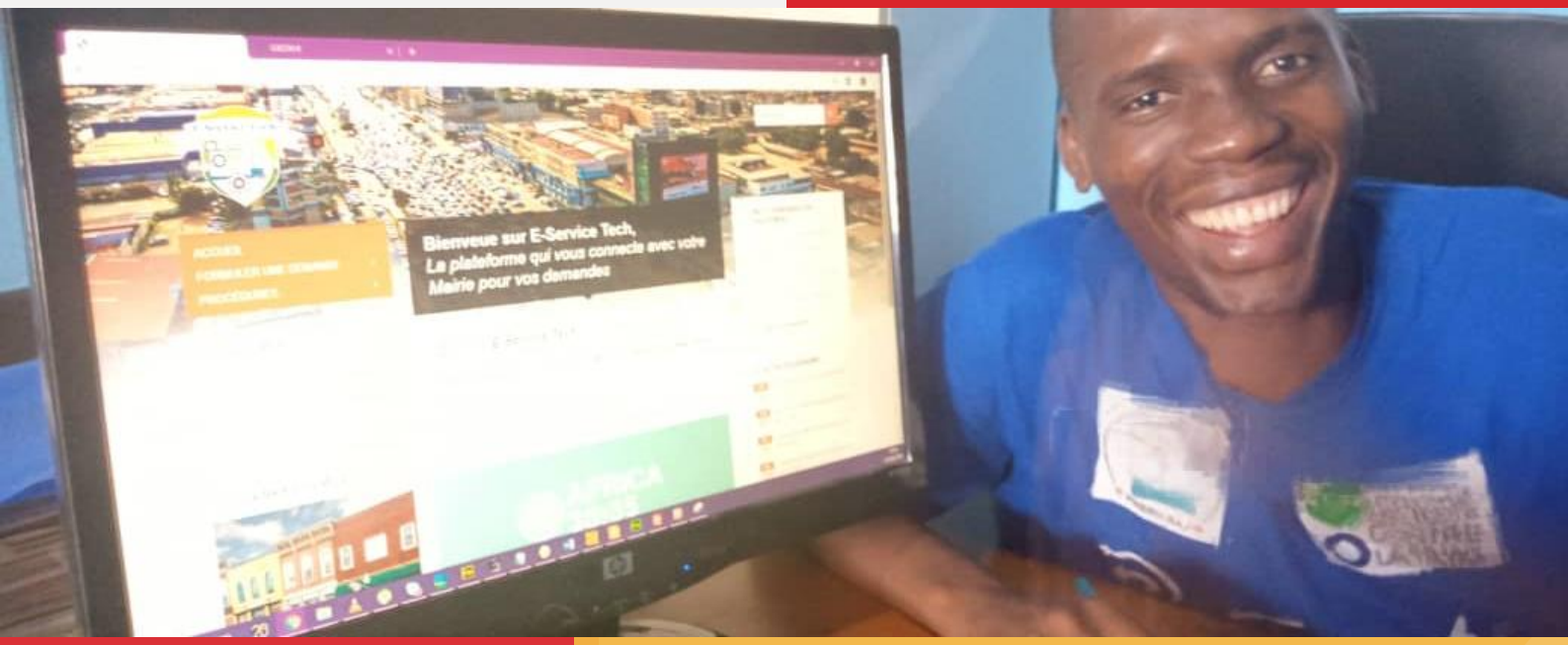
Cities Alliance Innovation Programme

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

Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums



- Grant recipient: **Association 3535**
- Partner: **Municipality of Cocody, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire**
- Grant amount: **USD 50,000**
- Duration: **08 months**
- Year: **2019-2020**

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

FINAL

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 is it?

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 under staffed. 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 and 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

eServices Techniques web application as provided as a free and open source software solution to the municipality of Cocody. The platform's key functionalities 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.

A demonstration video of the tech solution was realized and a training day was delivered to the municipality technical team.

During the pilot phase, the application has enabled 140 small vendors who made online requests to obtain an occupancy permit.

On average, the processing time of the request has significantly decreased from 8 weeks to 22 working days. The municipality is contemplating using the application on an ongoing basis.

The web application can be viewed online and is freely downloadable for other municipalities.

Testimonies

"When I heard I could ask for an occupancy permit right from my mobile phone, I decided to give it a try, and it worked for me."

— Ms. Saly, orange juice stall vendor

"There wasn't the need to do so many back and forth to get my occupancy permit. I thank the people behind eServices Techniques for this."

— Mr. Jean Koffi, owner of a tailor shop

Lessons learned

The eServices Techniques team had to navigate bureaucracy and decision-making structures with our partnering municipality.

The 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 (going to the municipality to make the request, finding out accurate information about the procedures, submitting the request to the right office). The team utilized 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.