“Civic tech”, a term first used in Africa just a few years ago, refers to any form of citizen expression communicated using new technologies with the aim of promoting democratic revival, economic innovation or social progress. The earliest signs of such initiatives can be traced back to Kenya, with the launch in 2007 of the online platform Ushahidi, developed to report post-election violence. Ten years on, at a time when civic tech movements are becoming increasingly well-organised and are looking to ensure their long-term viability, CFI – the French media development agency – provides an overview of initiatives in this area and paints the picture of a generation of engaged citizens.

What is civic tech an expression of?

Civic tech initiatives are, first and foremost, an expression of frustration and even dissatisfaction with the perceived gap between official discourse (on democracy, transparency and the fight against corruption) and the reality on the ground. They are the product of increased awareness and mobilisation among media outlets, individuals, activist groups and civil society organisations (CSOs) whose stated objectives focus on the establishment and deepening of democratic practices. Community functions and the widespread use of social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.) have made it easier to rally people around a particular cause and, now more than ever, are the key to opening up a dialogue between the public authorities and their constituents around the management of community affairs.

Promoting and sustaining the momentum

Whatever their goal, civic tech initiatives have one thing in common: they tend to be run by small teams and, in some cases, are the work of a single individual. The degree of formal structure varies from one case to the next, depending on when the initiative was first launched, the amount of available funding and, ultimately, the number of people actively involved on a long-term basis. While some initiatives plan to remain charitable, chiefly in order to maintain their freedom of action, most groups are now also looking at becoming more professional in order to increase the impact of their work. With the initial phase of online mobilisation now over, the key challenge facing civic tech projects today is to extend beyond the ephemeral communities formed around isolated causes in order to create a long-term dynamic of collective action involving a large number of citizens.

- **4 countries** studied (Benin, Kenya, Senegal, Tunisia)
- **69 civic tech players** interviewed, **83 initiatives** reported on and **47 financial backers** met
- **34 in-depth interviews** conducted in the field in the early summer of 2018.

Read the full assessment at cfi.fr

**About CFI**

A subsidiary of the France Médias Monde group, CFI, the French media development agency, actively promotes the development of the media in Africa, the Arab world and South-East Asia. Every year, CFI conducts around 30 projects falling under three major programmes: Media and Governance, Media and Business, and Media and Development. www.cfi.fr

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