

Enabling Social Innovation in Benin

Country Snapshot

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ¹

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Benin's social innovation ecosystem.

✓ Direct focus on social innovation ⌘ Connected but indirect focus on social innovation ✗ No focus on social innovation

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Official Definition of Social Innovation ⌘



No formal legal definition of "social innovation" has been identified in Benin's primary law. The concept is referenced through Benin's Programme d'Action du Gouvernement (PAG) 2021-2026 "Benin Revealed" strategy, which elevates digital innovation, enterprise development and social transformation as national priorities. Notably, Cabo Verde (a fellow West African SIDS) and Morocco have adopted national SSE policies — Benin is among the African economies showing positive GII momentum. ^{2 5}

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓



- Ministry of Digital Economy and Communication: Oversees digital transformation, e-government and ICT innovation within the Benin Revealed strategy. ⁴
- Agency for the Promotion of Investments and Exports (APIEX): Promotes FDI and private sector development, including for social enterprises and innovative startups. ⁴
- Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises and Promotion of the Private Sector: Supports MSME development, enterprise formalisation and entrepreneurship. ⁴
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance: Oversees social protection programmes and microfinance innovation for vulnerable populations. ⁴
- Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries: Leads agri-innovation programming; a significant social innovation vector in Benin's predominantly rural economy. ⁴

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓



- Programme d'Action du Gouvernement 2021-2026 (PAG "Benin Revealed"): Government Action Programme anchoring national development; elevates digital transformation, economic modernisation, social transformation and environmental protection as pillars. ⁴
- Benin Digital Strategy: Targets 80% digital public services by 2025; promotes e-government, digital inclusion and ICT entrepreneurship. ⁴
- Benin Start-Up Act (in development): Proposed legal framework to formally support startups and social innovators; aligned with PAG 2021-2026. ⁴

Policies, Laws & Regulations



- PAG 2021-2026 "Benin Revealed": Overarching government programme embedding social transformation and innovation across all sectors. ⁴
- Microfinance Regulatory Framework: Governs microfinance institutions, a critical enabling mechanism for grassroots social innovation and financial inclusion. ⁴
- NGO / CSO Regulatory Framework: Governs civil society organisations — primary vehicles for grassroots social innovation in Benin. ⁴
- Environmental Code: Governs environmental management and social impact compliance. ⁴

Official Statistics



119th/133 GII 2024 ranking — moved up the GII ranking in 2024 as one of eight Sub-Saharan African economies improving their position. Benin is performing at expectations for its income level. ²

Upward trend Benin is among 8 Sub-Saharan African economies that moved up the GII ranking in 2024, alongside Mauritius, Cabo Verde, Senegal, Kenya, Zambia, Mauritania and Burundi. ²

~56% of population lives in rural areas, making agricultural and community-based social innovation a priority. ⁶

Government Programs



- ARCH Social Protection Programme (Assurance pour le Renforcement du Capital Humain): Flagship social protection programme covering health insurance, microfinance, professional training and retirement for vulnerable populations. ⁴
- Digital Benin (Bénin Digital) Initiative: Government-backed digital transformation programme driving e-government, digital literacy and ICT innovation. ⁴
- Cotonou Agropolis: Agri-innovation hub being developed as part of the PAG to modernise agriculture and drive food systems innovation. ⁴
- Presidential Delivery Unit (PDU): Monitors and drives delivery of PAG 2021-2026 milestones, including innovation-related targets. ⁴

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders



- CIPMEN (Regional Center for Excellence for Entrepreneurship): Innovation and entrepreneurship support hub active across West Africa, including Benin. ⁴
- Co-creation Hubs and Digital Incubators (Cotonou): Growing ecosystem of tech startups and innovation hubs in Cotonou and Porto-Novo. ⁴
- University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC): Leading academic institution for applied research and human capital development. ⁴
- UNDP Benin: Supports SDG implementation, governance innovation and social enterprise development. ⁶
- French Development Agency (AFD): Funds social infrastructure, digital innovation and climate resilience projects. ⁶

Support Initiatives



Support modalities include government digital transformation programmes, ARCH social protection innovation, microfinance ecosystem development, and international development partner programming (UNDP, AFD, World Bank, EU). The ARCH programme stands as Benin's most ambitious social innovation in state-delivered social protection. ^{4 6}



Collaboration

Collaboration is structured through UN and bilateral development partnerships, with UNDP serving as the primary UN coordinator. The PAG Presidential Delivery Unit ensures cross-government coordination. Civil society, faith-based organisations and community groups are primary grassroots innovation actors. Regional collaboration through ECOWAS frameworks supports enterprise and digital innovation.⁴

FINANCE



Financing Schemes

- Government: ARCH social protection budget, PAG innovation programmes, microfinance development.⁴
- International donors: World Bank, EU, AFD, UNDP, UNICEF — across social protection, digital transformation and agricultural innovation.⁴
- Microfinance ecosystem: 150+ microfinance institutions (MFIs) providing financial services to entrepreneurs and social innovators at community level.⁴



Financing Inclusivity

The ARCH programme explicitly targets vulnerable populations (the poor, women, youth) with health insurance and microfinance. Benin's growing microfinance ecosystem improves financial access for grassroots social innovators, but scale and patient capital remain gaps for formal social enterprise financing.^{4,5}

SOCIETY



Public Awareness of Social Innovation

Public awareness of social innovation as a formal concept is limited but growing through the Benin Revealed strategy, digital transformation narrative and social protection programmes. Cotonou's startup and tech hub ecosystem is increasing visibility among urban youth. Discourse centres on "entrepreneurship", "digital transformation" and "community development".^{4,5}



Research

Research capacity is limited, led by the University of Abomey-Calavi and IMSP (Institut de Mathématiques et de Sciences Physiques). Applied research in agriculture, health and digital technology is growing. The GII 2024 notes Benin's improving innovation performance. Academic research on social innovation is nascent.^{2,6}



Education & Human Capital

Benin has invested in expanding access to education under the PAG; youth entrepreneurship education is being incorporated into higher education programmes. Vocational training through CFPA centres supports skills for social innovation. UNDP programming supports skills development for youth employment and enterprise.^{4,6}

Entrepreneurship



Enabling conditions for business



Innovation Capacity

GII 2024 — moving up the rankings; performing at expectations for its income level; part of the positive SSA momentum.¹

Global Innovation Index 2024



Entrepreneurship

ARCH Benin's flagship social protection innovation reaches the most vulnerable with health insurance, microfinance, training and retirement — a model for SSA.⁴

Social & Environmental Consciousness

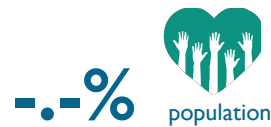


Benin-specific data not separately reported in the 2024 index.⁸

CAFWorld Giving Index 2024



Participation



Volunteering



Sustainability

Benin-specific EPI ranking not publicly available at time of publication.⁹

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2024