



Founded in 1961, CISV (Community, Commitment, Service, Volunteering) is a non-governmental organisation engaged in the fight against poverty and in promoting human rights within international cooperation and global citizenship education.

CISV, in partnership and collaboration with AITR, ViaggiSolidali and the many other community-based organisations, developed a sustainable tourism strategy which has been enrooted in Senegal from early 2000 decade, and is currently being implemented in Benin.

Community tourism is a social and ethic resource for the local populations, it is ecological, culturally and financially sustainable. Consequently, tourism as a community empowerment vehicle, is based on three principles:

- Intangible and material **heritage valorisation** through cultural mediation and community involvement.
- **Natural and environmental conservation.** The touristic structures use renewable energy resources and contribute to reduce pollution. They also commit to the preservation of the environment through eco-tourism itineraries and leading environmental protection activities.
- **Local development**, by means of community utilities, job opportunities (gender sensitive), local products consumption and local, national and international cooperation and networking.

This three principle are concretised using adapted and sustainable tools:

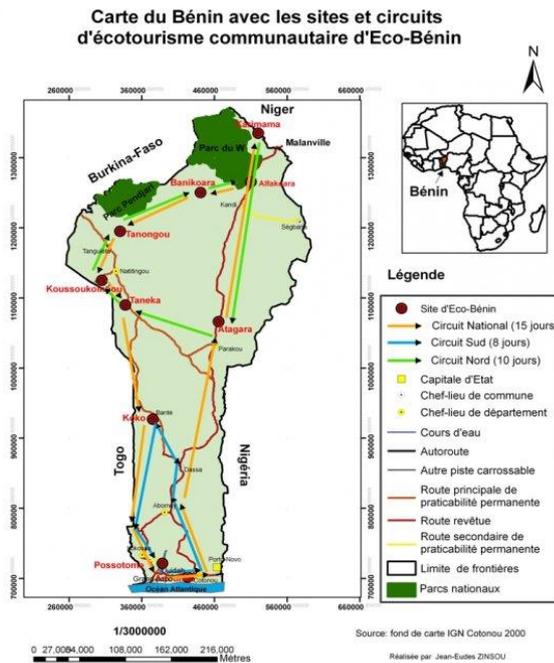
- **Quality reception standard**, referring to materials (equipment, hygienic rules, security) as well as human factors (competency, cultural skills, openness)
- **Capacities building** in order to improve and empower the communities through exchanging and sharing good practices as well as promoting cultural and environmental heritage defence concepts, deontology and languages studies.
- **Accountability:** using advocacy and claiming policies, we aim to a better dissemination and acknowledgement of community based touristic experiences.

In 2012, CISV Benin was asked to develop a community tourism strategy by the local Tourism Ministry.

A preparatory mission allowed us to identify the local stakeholders working according to the principles of sustainable tourism in the South West of the country, the historical NGO activities area. At the same time we launch a territorial strategy to increase the ownership and the implementation of community based tourism in partnership with the local Tourist Office.

This region has an important cultural and environmental heritage: Ouidah is the capital of Voudoun, the Benin ancestral religion, and, because of its position in the colonial and slavery system, it is considered a very important historical site for the whole country.

Furthermore, the city is placed in the centre of a subequatorial wet area, an ecosystem characterised by the proximity of the ocean to the river. Fishing and small handcraft industries (for example salt production), both based on the natural local resources, are basic income funds for the population, however this relationship between people and nature is very fragile. For instance the mangrove trees, which grow close to the salted lakes and lagoons are traditionally used for house holding breeding grounds. Though, this practice is reducing the amount of reproduction places for local fish species and increasing the coast erosion.



The conservation of the natural peculiarity of the territory, and mostly the preservation of the mangrove, has been the reason why the Beninese NGO Eco-Benin started working with community-based tourism in the Ouidah region. It had provided an alternative to the exploitation of natural resources and above all it had recognise tourism as a tool of community empowerment.

Eco-Benin is among the founders of the Beninese network of sustainable tourism FBO-TRS and they regularly participate to the International Eco-Tourism Society. Their community-based project has been included in the first sustainable tourism proposal in Benin fulfilled by CISV and Viaggi Responsabili in 2013.

From 1999 they created a network of 15 touristic sites in protected areas all around the country. The identification of the sites was made according to three factors:

- Environmental resources and bio-diversity
- Touristic potential
- Community motivation and municipality involvement

The community empowerment process has been realised in several steps:

- **Identification:** a stakeholders study, which aims to map the different private and public human resources and organisations working in the community that can be involved in the touristic offer organisation
- **Community mobilisation:** firstly, the entire community is invited to awareness meetings presenting the positive and negative impact of tourism as well as its potential for the environment protection and sustainable development. Secondly, the social and cultural aspects related to the intercultural exchanges are discussed to raise a better understanding of the tourist community reception.
- **Start-up of the touristic activities:** the community is invited to propose rules and members of the touristic association management, which include directors, guides, cooks and all the people involved in reception and discovery activities. This association signs a partnership with the municipality and with Eco-Benin that will then engage in supporting the local development through sustainable tourism. A capacities building training is offered to all the delegates and workers who aim to structure the several segments and aspects of the associations. The guides and the



community leaders participate to the mapping and selection of the itineraries as well as choosing the menu of the restaurants or the families who can host the travellers.

- **Execution of the project:** Eco Benin gives a financial support to the communities to start up micro-entrepreneurship activities as eco-lodge, restaurants, creative industries and family accommodations. This funding is supposed to be a loan, which will be paid back to the NGO. In order to achieve a better sustainability and diffusion of the process, the touristic association opens a bank account where the benefits of the community activities are deposited; the count of the touristic revenues is made in front of the entire community, who is also responsible for the decisions about the percentage to reinvest in public utilities and for their final destination and ultimately for paying back the loan to Eco-Benin.

The ultimate goal is to create a system where the NGO is in charge of the promotion and exposure of touristic activities and the community association manages all the rest, enhancing the local-based structure of the organisation. The social and economic impact of sustainable tourism on the communities is multiple: the different contexts and the duration of the projects are aspects that need to be taken into account for an evaluation of the outcomes, but we can already have an overview of the effects of sustainable tourism activities in the villages, according to different parameters of community empowerment:

- Local development: almost the 50% of the touristic revenues are allocated to the workers (young people and women) and 10% to organisational costs. Meanwhile the raw materials for touristic buildings and food are locally funded. In the region of Koussoukoingou (where the tourism activities have a longer history and are integrated with development aid actions) schools, reservoirs and warehouse have been built to facilitate women's economic activities.
- Increasing social action for a positive change: 20% of the revenues are addressed to public utilities, 20% to biodiversity conservation. The tourists are invited to contribute to replant trees during their holidays as a way to balance the carbon credits of an intercontinental plane journey.
- A better awareness and understanding of social and cultural diversity and intercultural exchange for both the tourist and the local population (many travellers visit several time the same community along the years)
- A stronger advocacy and communication with local decision makers, for instance with the tourism offices and official guides who promote (in Ouidah region) community itinerary and visiting.