



## KEN LOHENTO

### BACKGROUND

My name is Ken Lohento. I was born in 1973 in Cotonou, economic capital of the Republic of Benin, a small and beautiful country in West Africa. My father, Eskill Lohento, was a singer and a charismatic leader of the legendary music band of Benin, Poly Rythmo. My mother, Etiennette, works as civil servant. I have several brothers and sisters, as do most Beninenses. I have been married since 2002 to Regina, a very nice woman from Abomey, the historical capital city of Benin. We have two children born one spring night in 2003, in France. We live currently in Senegal for professional reasons. Even though I'm working now as an information and communication technology specialist, I'm most known in Benin as an actor as I was very active in that area. But this was another life, which I can tell in another opportunity.

### MY YEARS AT UNIVERSITY

At the only university of Benin at the time, the Université Nationale du Bénin (now called Université d'Abomey Calavi), I first studied English. But, because of difficulties with student strikes, I chose to study Information Sciences at the prestigious Ecole Nationale d'Administration. I studied information sciences from 1994 to 1997 in its center called CEFOCI. In the meantime, Benin acquired its first Internet connection in December 1995.

I really enjoyed using the Internet. I met new friends and, in particular, it helped me keep in close contact with my

girlfriend, who was in France at the time. The last year, we had to do an internship and write a thesis. Studying the state and perspectives of Internet in Benin was one of the two themes I proposed to the staff of the CEFOCI. Eventually they decided I would do my thesis on the second subject, because they said Internet was too new in Benin and that I would not have much information to analyze. But I had decided to study the state of Internet and had started gathering some information. There was much to say in reality. I refused their choice. I was told it was the consensus resulting from a panel of teachers' deliberations. I claimed that I'm sure their choice was the theme dealing with Internet, and that I wanted to double check their decision. I don't know for sure if I was right or if the coordinator of our study finally changed his mind but it was finally accepted that I worked on Internet in Benin! I did my internship at Centre Syfed-Refer (now called Campus Numérique Francophone) at the University, wrote my thesis, and it was accepted with distinction by the panel of judges. I got my diploma for a Bachelor in Information Sciences.

For some years, this document, which I put online with the help of a friend met on the Internet, was a reference regarding not only the state of Internet in Benin, but also in African countries. It was published in 1998 on a CDROM produced by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and a synopsis of it was published in a collective book edited by a French researcher and published in France.

After this thesis, I met various opportunities. I created with some friend ORIDEV, an NGO which aims at promoting ICT4D in 1998. I worked three years for ORIDEV as coordinator of the Information and Communication programme but decided to pursue my studies and obtain a Masters degree in information sciences. I saved money and in September 2001, I bought an air ticket and left Benin for France. Eventually I wrote a thesis in 2003 on information and communication technology and knowledge mediation in rural areas in Africa. All these documents I wrote can be downloaded from my personal website [www.iafric.net/benin](http://www.iafric.net/benin).

### TODAY

I'm currently working for the Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA), as coordinator of its programme dubbed "Uses and Policies of Digital Technology" (or ICT Programme)." PIWA is a regional non-governmental organisation based in Senegal, which works to promote citizenship, democracy, and change through the communication sector. The programme that I coordinate fall within three specific objectives: strengthening strategic thinking on ICT policies and uses (activities implemented via the

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framework of the CIPACO - Center for ICT Policies - West and Central Africa); building capacities for media and communicators on ICTs; supporting the production and dissemination of information resources through ICTs. My role is to initiate, coordinate, implement and manage the programme and its activities, with the support of project managers and consultants if appropriate.

I was a bit involved in WSIS before PIWA, but when I started working as the organization employee, I became deeply involved in the process. We studied African participation in WSIS, disseminated information about the whole process and supported civil society (CS) contributions to documents being negotiated. For example, together with the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), we supported the African Civil Society on the Information Society (ACSIS, a Pan-African network launched to serve as umbrella organization for various local CS bodies) to inform stakeholders on key issues debated in the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) report. This was done through a bilingual e-discussion. Moreover, PIWA funded an ICT expert to support African CS contributions in Geneva, during the Prepcom 3 meeting. I was also in Geneva on this occasion, but as a WGIG secretariat intern, due to a scholarship I won after having participated successfully in the first IGCBP organized by Diplo. I naturally worked with the CS group and several oral and written contributions had been made, through ACSIS, at Geneva.

In May 2006, I was appointed by the UN as a member of the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group of the Internet Governance Forum in May 2006, as a CS stakeholder. The main task of the Advisory Group is to prepare the substantive agenda and programme for meetings. I felt very proud of the appointment, not only because it was my first official appointment a UN level, but because of the nomination and selection processes : I was proposed by various CS constituencies. Knowing that these international bodies are confident in you is satisfying, but it's also a bit scary at the same time, because it is an important responsibility.

Apart from WSIS and IGF issues, I coordinate various projects and activities at PIWA. I have organized bilingual e-debates, organized workshops and coordinated reports on ICT policy issues. Some activities are related to strengthening media capacities in West Africa. Another important project I'm coordinating for West and Central Africa is the EuroAfrica-ICT initiative, supported by the European Union to promote scientific and technological cooperation between the European Union and Sub-Saharan Africa.

## THE EFFECTS OF THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME

I participated in Diplo's Internet Governance Capacity Building programme (IGCBP) in 2005. I was very glad to have been selected and it was very timely for me. The program helped me to understand Internet governance as a concept, at a time where there was a lot of debate and controversy around it.

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In addition, my experience of the Diplo programme was exciting as it was the first time I had used an online platform for learning. In e-learning courses where you use exclusively an online platform, you gain a lot in personal time management, but being alone before your computer is sometimes unsatisfactory, as online interactions can never replace physical interactions with tutors and fellow students. However, the overall experience was positive. It can be a cost-effective option. Regarding the Diplo e-learning platform, I found the HyperText, Forum, and Chat tools very interesting and innovative.

But it was for me a real challenge to attend the Programme and at the same time implement my activities at PIWA. It was only during my personal extra time (week end, nights, in particular) that I could do my exercises and participating in chats organized during work time was difficult.

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#### VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Development challenges are enormous for Africa and they go beyond promoting information and communication technology. One important issue currently is how Africa will solve its energy problems, which are an important threat to progress on the continent. Effective, democratic political governance is another important issue. Regional and continental integration will definitely strengthen Africa's position at the international level. I believe multi-dimensional capacity building, which has at its core the promotion of education, is where we need to invest primarily, whatever adjustment measures we might be advised or be inclined to put in place. My perspectives are to contribute to the promotion of information technology, but, at the same time, to contribute to the promotion and implementation of policies necessary for African communities to overcome poverty and for the continent to become an advanced economy.





**Ken LOHENTO**

**IPAO**