

ICT and improvement of
family planning, reproductive health
and HIV/AIDS issues
in developing countries:

The case of Senegal

*By Modou Fall Sall, Information
and Documentation Center,
African AIDS Research Network,
Dakar (Senegal)*

Senegal

- Located in Western Africa
- Covers an area of 196.722 km²
- Population of 9.278.617 habitants.

Statistics on family planning , reproductive health and HIV/AIDS situation in Senegal:

- HIV prevalence rate = 1,43%
- Age at the first sexual relations = 16 years
- Childhood mortality rate (for 1000 newbirthes) = 68
- Motherhood mortality rate (for 100.000 newbirthes) = 510
- Fertility rate = 172/1000
- Life expectancy (in 1990) = 54 years.

People need information and documentation useful to their activities:

- Libraries in FP, RH and HIV/AIDS issues exist in Senegal, essentially in Dakar.
- Most libraries can offer ICT including computers, CD-ROMs, local databases, and Internet
- Most Hospitals and other health centers do not have institutionalised libraries

Information and Communication Technologies (ITC) in Senegal

- Number of phone lines = 187.050
- Number of internet subscribers = 15.000
- Number of "internautes" (Internet users) = 30.000
- Number of web servers = 485
- Number of Internet Service Providers (ISP) = 20
- Number of Internet public access points > 100

Examples of costs for some Internet Providers

- University and Research Institutions: AUPELF/UREF; UCAD: Cost is about \$ US 12 per month.
- Private ISP: Metissacana; Telecomplus : Cost is about \$ US 20 per month
- Government: Primature: No cost for government services
- Cost for internet use in Cyber coffees is about \$ US 2 per hour

Before the launch of internet in Senegal (in 1996)

- *VIDEOTEX technology* (using Minitel Terminals)
- RIO (ORSTOM Informatic Network)
- HealthNet
- ACACIA
- Information Society in Africa
- LELAND initiative
- INFODEV
- CD-ROMs

How to fully use ICT to improve family planning, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS issues in Senegal

- To create specific services, diffusion lists and adapted products and CD-ROMs
- To develop specialized websites for diffusing and promoting informational resources
- To set up Internet access points and CD-ROM consultation points in clinics, health services, rural areas, schools, etc.
- To reduce costs of telecommunication services
- To reduce the fiscal charge for ISPs

How to fully use ICT to improve family planning, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS issues in Senegal

- To design an appropriate system which could stimulate the creation of African and Senegalese products
- To reduce taxes related to computer equipment and communication tools importation
- To sensitive health authorities and social leaders to the usefulness of ICT
- To organize training activities

How to fully use ICT to improve family planning, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS issues in Senegal

- To implement specialized intranets
- To create networks of persons and organizations
- To better integrate the country in the Globalized world to make easier the diffusion of Senegalise ITC products and services

Conclusion

Many constraints and difficulties limit the development of ICT in Senegal, despite the valuable efforts done by the Research and documentation institutions. However, one could be optimistic given the greater involvement of international and foreign donor organizations in the various national programs and initiatives related to ICT, and the African States political engagement to challenge the globalization movement.

Conclusion

The Information Society (which is characterized by conventional systems of technology transfer) contributes to marginalize many communities in Developing Countries and in Africa, constituting a great problem for people's initiatives to access to information related to family planning, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS issues.

In such a context, Initiatives enabling different kinds of users to have effective access to appropriate ICT has become a necessity.





How to fully use ICT to improve family planning, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS issues in Senegal

- To implement specialized intranets which enable organisations in the same areas to quickly share information and experiences.
- To create networks of persons and organisations which could deliver adapted information.
- To better integrate the country in the Globalized world to make easier the diffusion of Senegalese ITC products and services.

Before the launch of internet in Senegal (in 1996)

- *CD-ROMs* is being used in libraries since the eighteens. An inventory of CD-ROM installations in developing countries initiated by UNESCO in 1992 revealed that 53 potential organisations sites existed in Senegal. In health libraries, CD-ROMs such as POPLINE and MEDLINE are widely used for information research.
- *ACACIA Initiative* is an IDRC ongoing program devoted to ICT use in Senegal which aims to enable disadvantaged communities to easily access and use ITC to have information adapted to their needs.
- One could also mention similar projects initiated at the African and national level, such as the "*Information Society in Africa*" project of the African Economic Commission, the *LELAND Initiative*, the *INFODEV Program*, etc.

IDC of AARN

The Information and Documentation Center (IDC) of African AIDS Research Network (AARN) had been created in 1995 in order to provide to researchers and other HIV/AIDS (and related topics) information users in Africa the appropriate information and documentation they need. It also aims at becoming an active information and communication liaison between people involved in the fighting against HIV/AIDS in Western and Central Africa.

IDC of AARN Products & Services:

- 4 databases developed under CDS-ISIS software enable us to offer to users services and documentary products in response to their needs.
- A website had been developed so that different published documents can also be accessed online.

IDC of AARN

Products & Services:

- An e-mail information service provides selected and adapted information to people and organizations involved in the fighting against HIV/AIDS in Africa.
- Information research on POPLINE is offered to users disseminated in various African countries. The Information Center also uses Internet research opportunities and other CD-ROMs so as to better face users needs.