GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2016

*Economic, social and cultural rights
and the internet*

ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)
AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE (IDRC)

Global Information Society Watch

2016

APC   IDRC | CRDI

Global Information Society Watch 2016
Economic, social and cultural rights and the internet

SENEGAL

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN THE RIGHT TO ACCESS EDUCATION IN SENEGAL

Jonction
Ababacar Diop
jonction.e-monsite.comg

Introduction

Senegal's population is currently estimated at 14 million inhabitants. The average age is 22, meaning that the country's population is relatively young. According to a study by the National Agency for Statistics and Demography, "Children under 15 represent 42.1% of the overall population. This proportion is higher among boys (43.6%) than girls (40.5%)."[1]

Senegal has a 54.76% internet penetration rate, according to a 2015 report by the Telecommunications and Post Regulatory Agency.[2] Mobile access is overwhelmingly the primary way that Senegalese connect to the internet. There are 7,396,940 people connected to the internet, 94% of them through 2G and 3G mobile services, while only 1.4% access the internet through fixed-line ADSL services.

One never gets tired of arguing for the importance of education in society, especially one in which the majority of the population is made up of young people. This is the age group that most needs to have its right to education met, and is also the age group that has grown up with new technologies. Because of this our report focuses on the right to access education and the internet in Senegal.

Policy and political background

Senegal signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) on 13 February 1978. Three months later – on 13 May 1978 – the covenant was ratified in domestic law.

Education is a fundamental human right necessary for everyone to affirm and develop their personality and identity. It is fundamental for people to participate in the economic, social, cultural and political life in their country. Education allows a person to develop their physical and intellectual aptitudes, to be fulfilled, and integrated into society socially and professionally. The right to education is recognised in Senegal's constitution, which states in article 22: "The state has the obligation to carry out the education and training of the youth through creating public schools. All children, boys and girls everywhere in the national territory, have the right to have access to school. Institutions that are part of religious and non-religious communities are also recognised as places of education."[3]

Article 3 of the National Law on Education reaffirms the state's obligation: "National education is placed under charge of the state, which guarantees citizens the right to education."[4]

Nevertheless, despite the rapid roll-out of the internet in Senegal, offering strategic possibilities for the state to progressively ensure the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs), there is little evidence that it has been sufficiently used to meet the right to education in the country.

Virtual education: Meeting the needs of excluded youth

The state has made significant efforts to meet its responsibility to progressively ensure the right to education to the maximum availability of its resources. This includes investing in school infrastructure, recruiting teachers for primary education, installing computers in some schools, and connecting them to the internet.

The private sector has helped the state with regards to e-education, providing learners with access to digital learning resources, and allowing children to become familiar with the digital environment from a young age. For example, the IAM Group, a private educational institution, offers distance courses through a virtual classroom.[5]

However, despite all the efforts that have been made, there are huge disparities in access to education for Senegalese youth. Many children are still abandoned to their own fate on the street, many parents sometimes do not have sufficient resources to pay the education fees of their children, and some children live too far away from schools to attend. Furthermore, many of those who do receive schooling have difficulties accessing higher education even if they have been awarded the appropriate

1   www.ansd.sn/ressources/publications/1-demographie-SESN2013.pdf
2   www.osiris.sn
3   www.gouv.sn/Titre-II-Des-libertes-publiques-et.html
4   www.gouv.sn/Titre-II-Des-libertes-publiques-et.html
5   www.groupeiam.com/index.php/e-learning/271-classe-virtuelle

high school diplomas. This is mostly due to a lack of space in universities to enrol them.

The difficulties Senegalese have in accessing higher education is a real problem that education authorities have had to grapple with for years. There is currently insufficient capacity in the country's universities to accept any more students than they do. This leaves high school graduates, many with great potential, without any means to further their studies.

One solution to this crisis explored by the state has been the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to bridge the gap. It is in this context that the Virtual University of Senegal[6] has been created, allowing for distance learning rather than face-to-face pedagogy.[7]

The Virtual University of Senegal was created under Decree No. 2013-1294 with the aim of "put[ting] information and communications technologies at the core of the development of higher education and at the centre of research to better allow students access to higher education and to training, and to reduce inequalities concerning access to education."[8] Besides those who are unable to register at universities because there is no space, the Virtual University of Senegal allows access to education for people with reduced mobility, as well as others who may be limited in attending classes at universities, such as new mothers or others with prohibitive family or social duties.

Among other things, the initiative created the Open Digital Space which offers online resources, including teaching tools, for students, teachers and researchers.[9]

The Virtual University of Senegal is a good example of what should be rolled out in the school system generally. It is a perfect illustration of the possibilities of virtual learning compared to face-to-face pedagogy. Its educational services are now substantial. As stated by the rector: "To date, we have 200 contract teachers and 1,500 tutors on contracts."[10]

However, numerous obstacles to the distance learning system remain. Two key problems are: a) insufficient access to electricity, and power cuts due to an ill-maintained electrical network, and b) the unavailability of a high-speed internet connection and the high cost of internet access. There are also challenges around developing strong pedagogical standards and processes of evaluation.

To achieve the right to education using the internet, the government should implement its policy on the development of infrastructure and digital resources so that the internet is accessible to everyone and everywhere in the national territory. This should involve all relevant stakeholders, as well as international cooperation. The private sector must be encouraged to continue to invest in distance learning. The Open Digital Space, for example, is a good model to follow.

Conclusion

Digital applications and resources are indispensable for the realisation of ESCRs, especially when it comes to the right to education. The internet offers developing countries like Senegal a real opportunity to realise the right to education. The Virtual University of Senegal is a perfect example that illustrates this.

Nowadays innovation is the engine that creates wealth and possibilities. Similarly, education is an energising force for the socioeconomic development of our countries. That is why the right to education is a fundamental one that the state must endeavour to secure for its citizens if it wants to answer the questions presented to us at the crossroads of development. It is also why the internet, a key innovation of our time, must be a part of this equation.

Today we cannot think about policies and strategies for the implementation of our fundamental human rights without including the internet – a tool that has profound implications for our access to information and knowledge. This is particularly the case when it comes to realising the right to education in developing countries.

Action steps

We recommend the following actions regarding the use of the internet in securing the right to education in Senegal:

- Ensure high quality, affordable and accessible access to the internet for everyone. This is critical if the internet is to be integrated into education policy. At the same time, a policy dealing with upgrading the electricity grid needs to be developed.

- Develop distance learning programmes which include appropriate online teaching resources. This is important for the inclusion of those who are unable to access schools or universities. Given that universities in the country have reached their capacity, it is important to continue to create virtual alternatives for higher education and learning.

- Civil society must continue to advocate for due consideration to be given to the internet among policy makers when it comes to securing the right to education for all.

---

6   www.uvs.sn
7   www.uvs.sn/?page_id=14
8   www.adl.sn/acteur/uvs
9   www.uvs.sn
10 www.uvs.sn/?page_id=847

Economic, social and cultural rights and the internet

The 45 country reports gathered here illustrate the link between the internet and economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs). Some of the topics will be familiar to information and communications technology for development (ICT4D) activists: the right to health, education and culture; the socioeconomic empowerment of women using the internet; the inclusion of rural and indigenous communities in the information society; and the use of ICT to combat the marginalisation of local languages. Others deal with relatively new areas of exploration, such as using 3D printing technology to preserve cultural heritage, creating participatory community networks to capture an "inventory of things" that enables socioeconomic rights, crowdfunding rights, or the negative impact of algorithms on calculating social benefits. Workers' rights receive some attention, as does the use of the internet during natural disasters.

Ten thematic reports frame the country reports. These deal both with overarching concerns when it comes to ESCRs and the internet – such as institutional frameworks and policy considerations – as well as more specific issues that impact on our rights: the legal justification for online education resources, the plight of migrant domestic workers, the use of digital databases to protect traditional knowledge from biopiracy, digital archiving, and the impact of multilateral trade deals on the international human rights framework.

The reports highlight the institutional and country-level possibilities and challenges that civil society faces in using the internet to enable ESCRs. They also suggest that in a number of instances, individuals, groups and communities are using the internet to enact their socioeconomic and cultural rights in the face of disinterest, inaction or censure by the state.

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH
2016 Report
www.GISWatch.org

APC

IDRC | CRDI
International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

Canada