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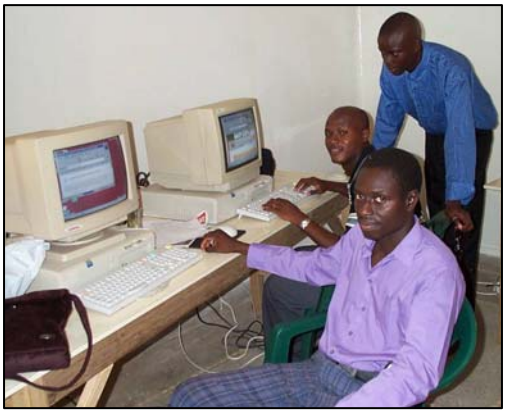
We build strong kids, strong families, strong communities.

case study

# YMCA of Senegal

## Youth and Technology



Young students learning computer skills at YMCA Senegal's Café Infonet.

### Introduction

In 2001, the Organization of African Unity launched the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD): A vision and strategic framework for Africa's renewal. As one of the original signatories to NEPAD, the government of Senegal has made information technology a priority development area in an effort to address the digital divide between developed and less developed countries. The government challenged public and private institutions alike to create innovative programs that provide technology equipment and instruction. The Senegal YMCA responded to the government's challenge by initiating the InfoNet-Jeunes (Youth InfoNet) program in October 2001. The YMCA's stated goal in launching InfoNet-Jeunes is the "dispersion of Information Technology and Communication knowledge to society's most disadvantaged persons."

The InfoNet-Jeunes program has undergone three phases. In the first phase, the YMCA partnered with a local technology organization to provide widespread and affordable Internet access. The YMCA was able to provide Web access and personal assistance at a third of the average cost of Senegal's Internet providers. Initiated in 2004, the second phase (Technology for All) set out to train students, job seekers and office employees in basic business software. Today, the InfoNet program has entered its third phase, Technology in Schools, which aims to provide computer literacy programs for children at primary and secondary schools. The YMCA has partnered with local private schools to introduce basic computer literacy into the curriculum.

### Plan and methodology

The Technology in Schools project works with schools that wish to establish a computer training program but do not have the resources to obtain computers. The sustainability strategy is very innovative. The YMCA purchases computers from a local organization with a 50-percent down payment. The YMCA pays the remaining 50 percent over two years through the collection of symbolic monthly fees paid by the students (about $3 a month). The income generated covers the cost of the computer payment and YMCA program staff who manage the program and provide technical support. Students are taught the basics of computer literacy, such as understanding the keyboard and mouse, in addition to the basic use of Windows® Office® software components. In compliance with a protocol agreement, the computers are handed over to the schools after two or three years to provide students with long-term access to IT learning.

### Keys to success

It was essential for the Technology in Schools program to be self-sufficient. Thus, the program was developed as a creative partnership between the Senegal YMCA, a computer hardware reseller and the local schools. All parties gained in that the YMCA was able to broker services for the community, the computer company was able to sell off some of its inventory and the local schools were able to offer courses to their students that they otherwise would not be able to do. The success of the program was due largely to the fact that it did not place a financial burden on the Senegal YMCA. YMCA World Service made it possible for the YMCA of Senegal to launch the InfoNet program.

### Achievements to date

The Technology in Schools project currently reaches over 400 youth at three schools. Among the software packages offered at each school is an application designed to assist students in their social studies research assignments. One instructor even abandoned plans to invest in a traditional encyclopedia set given the wealth of information available in the software package. The leadership at each school feels that it could double the number of student participants if only they had Internet access. Many of Senegal's youth feel detached from the rest of the world, so access to information on the Web is a top request among young people.

### Future plans

Technology in Schools can be adapted to all academic settings. Its potential for expansion is directly proportional to the availability of computers. There are ten schools in Dakar on the waiting list for the first phase of the project. YMCA Senegal plans to expand the project to two more schools by installing ten computers at each school.

## testimonial

*Mr. Nadiak, a forty-year-old man from Senegal's Ziguinchor region, was employed by the state for several years as an economics professor. Unfortunately, he had limited access to technology in the location where he was stationed. For a long time, his desire had been to learn how to operate a computer and to own a mobile phone. When one of students mentioned the technology courses offered by the YMCA, Mr. Nadiak decided to spend his summer break at the YMCA in Dakar. His self-imposed goal was to "become connected to the world." During a three-month period, Mr. Nadiak took software courses in MS Office and obtained a second-hand mobile phone.*

*"Thanks to the YMCA, I am no longer in isolation and I have joined the digital world," Mr. Nadiak said. "I will never forget this experience." Mr. Nadiak later assumed employment at an international organization in Dakar.*