

Ana Lorena Ramos Maltes
ES.259- IT in Africa

"We are living a tragedy in Africa now, because of the destruction of our population caused by a disease we cannot cure. I think what we can do now is to strengthen and improve our efforts at prevention." -Abdoulaye Wade, President of Senegal.¹

"If she [a woman] gathers together a group of ten or twenty women and she talks to them - without fanfare, without drums or trumpets - and explains the problems of AIDS so that it sinks in, then we will make progress. And that is possible in Senegal."²
-Andoulaye Wade, President of Senegal

Overview

Senegal is one of the forefront leaders in the prevention of AIDS in Africa. Though only 0.8% of its population is infected with the HIV virus, the number is escalating due to immigration, lack of education and cultural and religious barriers. In the village on Niomré, near the city of Louga, there is an urgent need for women's sexual education. In the village, 94% of the population is Muslim and practices such as polygamy and wife inheritance are common. The project plans on assessing the needs of these women and to find ways in which sexual education can be brought to them in a manner that will not interfere with their culture or religion. The educational program will consist on teaching to the women in the village how the HIV virus is transmitted, how it may be prevented, the benefits of testing and the use of different types of contraceptives. Different educational tools and methods include having a leader from the village organizing different workshops to discuss different topics and bringing a theater group from the nearby city of Louga to perform a skit that tells of the prevention and seriousness of HIV.

Implementation

The chief of Niomré, Serigne Thierno Lo, has expressed his concern for the spread of AIDS and has been open in accepting educational programs and organizations into his village. He also points out that religion teaches Muslim women to be discreet about their sexual lives which may cause some women to be apprehensive towards the programs.

The basic framework for the educational program would be developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the months leading to its on-site implementation. It is important to be in contact with different Non-Governmental Organizations who work in the area such as the United Nations' Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Society of Women Against AIDS in Africa (SWAA) and introduce others to this region such as Interact Worldwide which supports regional partners who work in the affected area. This organization not only provides educational

¹ <http://allafrica.com/stories/200107020491.html>

² <http://allafrica.com/stories/200107020491.html>

media to be used in teaching but also facilitates contraceptives. Hopefully, through this project Interact Worldwide will decide to bring its services to Niomré.

There should be a deep study into the Senegalese and Muslim culture in order to develop successful teaching techniques. This may include consulting professors from the MIT and/or Harvard community who are experts in Muslim culture and religion. Also, there should be a study of the most successful contraceptives to bring to the village regarding price, sustainability and simple usage. There has been the introduction of the female condom to some female factory workers that according to Yassine Fall, UNIFEM director in Dakar, has shown success. The project could also include the founding of a Women's Dispensary in the village, where women can turn to for support, sexual education and contraceptives. This last idea could be hard to develop and potentially unsuccessful due to the cultural and religious barriers present in the village.

The project is an effort to create a support network for women in the Senegalese village of Niomré. This network will include different NGOs and will be complemented by a series of educational conferences or presentations that will include topics such as: Muslim women and religion, contraceptive methods, what is HIV and how is it transmitted, HIV testing and, most importantly, the prevention of the spread of AIDS and its correlation with having a healthy sexual life.

Funding

The funding could be attained from different programs and organizations including the MIT Public Service Center, possibly from the IDEAS Competition and PSC Fellowship. The Senegalese government has shown a strong compromise in the prevention of AIDS and the different NGOs mentioned above could help contact the Ministry of Health of Senegal for the program's funding. The participation of the NGOs will be crucial for this project, not only for what they can give in monetary terms, but also for the support and previous knowledge that will help enhance and secure the perpetuity of this program.

Team

The team will need no less than 5 participants. Each member could be in charge of a particular area of research and/or study such as, religion and culture, the different contraceptive methods, etc.

Timeline

The most important part of the project that is the developing of the educational framework will be developed in MIT by students and their mentors. This will include the input of different organizations which we contact as well as input coming from Senegalese programs, organization and, hopefully, the government.

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