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De-stigmatizing HIV/AIDS in Rural Senegal

The Crucial Importance of Interdisciplinary
Collaboration

Roos Willems, Ph.D.
Research Associate, Dept of Anthropology
Catholic University of Leuven (KUL), Belgium

Senegal – Country Profile

■ General demographics

- Population: 11.5 million
- 25 and younger: 64.1%
- Urban population: 41%
- Ethnically divers: Wolof, Serer, Peul, Mandingue, Diola
- Literacy rate 38% (women 28%)
- Life expectancy at birth: 54.3 y



■ Some Economic indicators

- Annual growth rate: 5%
- Per capita Income: \$1,792
- HDI: 156/177
- Poverty rate: 57.1%
- Agriculture: 70% pop <> 15% GDP



NGO working in rural areas on food security

Focus groups with 20 farmers (men and women) in three different regions in 2006



- Generally, participants said to not personally know someone with AIDS.
- At the same time, most were well conversed with existing HIV/AIDS facilities as well as modes of prevention

HIV/Aids situation

- 2007 HIV prevalence rates (Source: UNAIDS & CNLS)
 - Total population 0.7%
 - Men 0.4%
 - Women 0.9%

 - Women 25-29 years old 1.5%
 - Pregnant women 1.7%

- => One of the lowest on the African continent
 - 0.6% in USA
 - 5% in Sub Sahara Africa

Background

- Political stability since independence
- Highly regulated sex industry & safe blood banks
- National Aids Program started in 1980s
- 1997 National Behavior Survey showed positive results since 1993
- 1998 Free anti-retroviral treatment (ARV)
- 1999 International Conference on Traditional Healing & HIV/Aids
- 2004 Free and confidential testing

Recent observations

2005 Senegal Demographic and Health Survey (Source: Min. Health)

- HIV/AIDS knowledge level is high, also among youth

however

- Knowledge fails to translate into safe behavior, particularly among young women

and

- Certain high risk groups have largely remained untouched by aids programs
 - Sex workers - 20% prevalence rate
 - Men having sex with men – 22% prevalence rate

Rural Senegal in 1994

| 4 questions on HIV transmission | 1990-92 | 1994 |
|--|---------|------|
| Score of Men | 1.6 | 2.1 |
| Score of Women | 0.8 | 2.6 |
| Don't knows of men | 24% | 14% |
| Don't knows of women | 66% | 20% |
| Casual sex in past 12 months for Men | 39% | 21% |
| Casual sex in past 12 months for Women | 15% | 18% |

Survey of 240 men & 242 women (Source: Lagarde, Pison & Enel 1997-1998)

- ⇒ Increase of aids related knowledge
- ⇒ Decrease of at-risk behavior

In 2003

| 4 questions on HIV transmission | 1997 | 2003 |
|--|------|------|
| Estimate personal risk of being infected by HIV as high or very high | 49.1 | 17.2 |
| Report having changed behavior to protect themselves against AIDS | 56.3 | 24.9 |
| Fidelity and /or partner selection | 93 | 58 |

Survey of 866 men and 709 women (Source: Wade, Enel & Lagarde 2006)

=> Drastic change in attitudes towards AIDS threat

=> And PLWHA stigmatization is widespread

- 73.9% say "PLWHA should not mix with other villagers"
- 65.1% ready to provide care to a PLWHA

“Rural” risk factors

- Increased vulnerability because of
 - fewer services, poverty, political instability, cross-border migration, polygamy, female circumcisions and widow inheritance
- Seasonal labor/migrant population (Source: Kane et al 1993)
 - 27% of migrant men HIV positive & 11.3% of spouses of migrants
- Sentinel limited to urban centers in each regions
 - Extrapolation of regional urban centers data may mask serious epidemics at local level (E.g. Casamance displaced populations)
- HIV/AIDS sites increase lags behind in rural areas
 - E.g. ARV treatment centers: 53 in Dakar, 26 rest of the country
- Transportation problems (cost & time) to existing sites
 - 60% of villages accessible through sand roads only

Link to food security

- Monitoring of HIV/AIDS in rural areas of utmost importance
 - current food crisis at global level
 - precarious food situation at national level
- Impact of HIV on
 - Human capital (household labor shortages, lower education levels, loss of indigenous knowledge transfer between generations)
 - Financial capital (medical costs and funerals, affected HH risk increased difficulties in getting loans from banks, infected become unemployed)
 - Physical capital (sale of land and other assets to cover costs, reduced value crop because of lower productivity)
 - Social capital (local networks fragment)
 - Political capital (affected families no longer participate in decision making processes)
- HIV/AIDS affects food security at national level

"I think AIDS is like half of death, because it breaks up a couple."

"AIDS causes discord into the couple and brings death."

"Having AIDS is like dying immediately, it destabilizes the family."

"AIDS can only lead to divorce."

Role of religion

- Religious leaders involved in AIDS awareness campaigns virtually from the start
 - Yet, HIV/AIDS continues to be perceived as divine punishment for promiscuity
 - 2008 Dakar survey: 48.5% of secondary school pupils agree
 - In rural areas "AIDS=divorce" -> break up of small holder farming units with subsequent threat to food security situation and death to the family
 - One study in rural Senegal suggest negative link between religion and preventative behaviors (Lagarde et al 2000)
 - Being religious may give men protective feeling
 - May decrease women's control over personal risk to HIV infections
- => AIDS perceived as external threat not under individual's control

Conclusions

- Unless effectively controlled and prevented-forecast = 2.2% by 2010
 - CNLS Strategic Plan 2008-13 foresees programs fighting stigma en discrimination
 - Most effective way of message channeling in rural areas is known
 - men more influenced by informal discussion or radio
 - women by public meetings and school education
 - However, urgent need to review message formulation
 - Current message too routine and ineffective, does not take into account socio-cultural factors
 - Need for interdisciplinary action/research : medical knowledge combined with anthropological analysis
- => Culturally nuanced education campaigns grounded in interdisciplinary understandings