**New Information Technologies and the Democratic Process**


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**Information and Communications Technologies and
Social Development in Senegal**


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In towns, people are used to inflating electoral rolls out of all proportion. Neither the dead nor the absent are crossed off. It seems that General Faidherbe still votes at Port Louis - and four times rather than once, at that. In the bush, the opposite happens: it is the living who are crossed off.

*Léopold Sédar Senghor*

## Introduction

When the State of Senegal acceded to Independence in 1960, it inherited the telecommunication system of the former occupying power. In 1985, the *Société nationale des Télécommunications* (SONATEL*)* was created to unify the national and international telecommunications which up until then had been run by TELESENEGAL. The public authorities had understood that the development of this sector would lead to the emergence of an information and communication society based on the new technologies.

The government first employed these technologies to gather statistical data for managing public finance, controlling wages, collecting taxes and keeping the population under surveillance. But, as from the second half of the 1990s, it was forced to lift the constraints on the dissemination of information. This process, which led to the "freeing up" of information from political control by the State, came about quite spontaneously. It brought IT and telecommunication tools together with those of the radio, so that information could be distributed without let or hindrance. This situation, however, which was imposed by circumstances that we shall examine later, did not figure in the plans of the ruling class. So official communication policy remained circumspect.

Nevertheless, as from 1994, the emergence of private radio stations invited comparison and, hence, emulation. With the appearance of private FM radio stations using the new information and communication technologies (ICT), freedom of expression took a great leap forward. The public relations company, the press and the documentation services of the ministerial departments - that up until then only used IT for accumulating data - were all undermined. Through the efforts of professionals like journalists who had vowed to struggle for freedom of expression, the democratization of Senegalese society was reinforced. Electoral history shows continual progress towards democracy, in spite of the reticence of those in power. The new ICT devices have played more than one nasty trick on the political actors opposed to honest elections. The Ministry of the Interior was forced to undergo a considerable transformation before organizing transparent, genuine elections in February and March 2000.

This influenced the technical and financial procedures in the development of new ICT. It came to be used by the public authorities in collecting public revenue, more rigorous management of civil servants and greater control over waged workers: in short, it contributed to the modernization of the State, which was seen as part of the democratization of society. This study assesses the efforts made by the Administration to adapt to this requirement for free and widespread dissemination of information. Thus we shall see how the need to collect information, promoted by previous policies based on the cult of administrative secrecy, was able to serve a new purpose: giving out information to the largest number of citizens. This had

a positive impact on the democratic process, particularly as concerns the right to information and freedom of expression.

The first part of this study analyzes the information policy of the Senegalese State through the various stages of its evolution towards the coupling of the computer with telecommunications and later, with radio/television. It also examines the attempt of Abdou Diouf's regime to improve institutional communication, while respecting the specific requirements of the armed forces and national defence. The second part analyzes the changes in the Ministry of the Interior. An examination of questions concerning the electoral rolls enables us to look once again at the polemics of the actors in the democratic game. As for the third part, which concentrates on private and State media, it raises issues relating to the monopoly of distribution and arbitration by the *Haut Conseil de l'Audiovisuel (HCA)* and mentions the election monitoring. The fourth part looks at the lessons to be drawn from the elections during the Internet era. It identifies the shortcomings and weaknesses in the Administration's preparations for the elections and highlights proposals by political actors to overcome them. Finally, we shall examine the relationships of the new regime with the media, the use of the new ICT during the referendum, the 2001 legislative elections and the "general policy" discourse of the Prime Minister.

## IT taken to the extreme

The State has given much attention to telecommunications since the federation with Mali broke up in 1960. At a time when the Senegalese were locked into a trial of strength with their neighbours, on 18 August 1960 the Senegalese intercepted two messages from Colonel Soumaré to two companies of the Malian army stationed in the Casamance. He gave the order to return to the capital to maintain public order. These messages had been sent on orders from Modibo Keita, President of the Malian Federation, without the knowledge of the Minister of Defence, Mamadou Dia. President Senghor gave out that it was "these two messages that put us on the alert and made us, in turn, call on our people's militia to resist this show of force." The Senegalese emerged as the winners, as the Republican Guard, which came from Thiès, 75 kilometres from Dakar, were able to resist the troops of the Malian federal army (Ndiaye 1980: p.182)

A *Commission nationale de la télécommunication*, attached to the President's Office, had been created in 1960. In 1972, a *Comité national de l'informatique* was set up. In 1987 it was the turn of the *Délégation à l'Informatique.*[1] The former head of the *Direction du Traitement automatique de l'Information (DTAI)* was appointed head of the new body. It first depended on the Office of the President of the Republic and was then put under the supervision of different ministerial departments.

State policy on the new ICT was spelt out by the President of the Republic and in the Ministries for the Modernization of the State and for Scientific Research and Technology. Official information policy was stifled during Abdou Diouf's regime, because IT, its natural support, was never under the supervision of the Ministry of Communication. Right from the start, State policy on the new ICT never integrated IT tools. In the international political

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[1] Decree No. 87-1303 of 20 October 1987, which nominated a *Délégué à l'Informatique.*

context that prevailed at the time, the only concern of the public authorities was that telecommunications and IT should be converted into instruments of sovereignty.

The first task of the *Délégation à l'Informatique* was to coordinate the IT procedures of the administration and the parastatal agencies. Responsibility for the IT framework lay essentially with the *Ministère de l'Economie, des Finances et du Plan* which relied on the DTAI apart from the IT centre of the *Direction des Douanes* (CID), which is responsible for Customs, and the Ministry of the Interior through the *Direction de l'Automatisation du fichier (DAF)*, responsible for the automatization of the files.

Although the Administration has not completely achieved its objective of "modernizing the State", there has been some progress. IT as an information tool is used in administering property and people, for managing personnel more rigorously, for following the careers of State employees and for treating waged workers more efficiently. However, the only part of the the public administration to carry out a coherent IT policy is the DTAI and the IT service of the *Direction des Douanes*, which has developed the "GAINDE system".

IT has been introduced into the structures and procedures by national projects aimed at setting up a data bank on persons (individuals and collective bodies), land and the organizational structure and networks of the Ministry of the Interior, increasing revenues collected by the Ministry of Finance and improving the management of human resources with, in particular, the "Personnel Function Project", of the *Ministère de la Fonction Publique.*

The first project, based on the Ministry of the Interior and entitled "Project for Regional IT units for Development" (URID) covers the whole national territory. The local outposts of the Administration are natural providers of information and all the administrative authorities - government, prefects and sub-prefects - possess the equipment enabling them to stock the data they collect.

The second project aims at improving the State's revenues by broadening the base for property taxes and increasing the rate of recovery. This project is making a more comprehensive census of building property, assessing its value by working out what is owed in taxes and identifying the owner among the various occupants. Its work is supported by aerial photography and digital data interpretation.

As for the third project, known as GAINDE (Système de Gestion automatisée des Informations douanières et des Echanges), it was started in 1984 by the *Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances,* with the assistance of the *Comité d'Appui à l'Informatique*. Its latest initiative, the "Personnel Function Project", has taken up the old dream of automatizing the civil service, which was first encouraged by the *Bureau Organisation et Méthode (BOM)* in the President's Office. The study was started in 1979, when the *Ministère de la Fonction Publique* was experiencing increasing difficulties in managing its different personnel and the administrative regulations concerning them. It was a question of collecting information on the pay, administration and current management of the personnel from the ministries employing them and incorporating them into one master file. This project freed staff from routine administrative tasks, enabling the State to catch up with a backlog of ten years and take action on administrative decisions about the reclassification and authentication of files in the central filing system. Thus employees were able to get the promotions as envisaged in the career plans of their corporations. Files have been reconstituted and lost documents recovered. At the

same time the service chiefs of the central and territorial administration have been instructed about the importance of efficient management of human resources.

These projects have helped to civilize the relationships between the Administration and citizens, but they have also reinforced the democratic process. The setting up of a Ministry for the Modernization of the State and giving it to an IT expert, Magued Diouf, symbolized the drive towards IT taken to the extreme.[2] But the State's IT policy has not coincided with its policy on telecommunications and information. It would in fact be interesting to analyze the reasons why the political decision-makers did not envisage the use of the new ICT in the State media. A document entitled "Senegal's strategy on the information highways" was evaluated by experts brought together by the Ministry for Scientific Research and Technology as a "round-up of prospective projects" and they deplored "the weak institutional mechanisms for taking the necessary action to promote a greater use of ICT in an overall, coherent policy." (Ministry for Scientific Research, 1998: 27).

IT and telecommunications are thus making progress, but separately from one another. From 1960 to the first telecommunication reform in 1985, Senegal had 23,000 telephone lines. The network was old and dilapidated and often broke down. When the State restructured the *Office national des Postes et Télécommunications (OPT*) into two separate companies, the *Office des Postes et de la Caisse d'Epargne (OPCE)* and the *Société nationale des télécommunications* (SONATEL), it decided to develop the telecommunication sector. In 1989, those formulating State policy only vaguely realized the issues at stake when they forecast "the advent of a communication society, based on the development of information technology, which will make the world still more interdependent and influence ways of life and production..." (*Ministère du Plan and de la Coopération*, 1989: 34).

## *The magic trio*

As a result of the first reform the telecommunications network is now 90 per cent digital. The number of telephone lines has risen from 23,000 in December 1995 to 80,000 and the telephone system has a capacity of 105,200 lines. During this period there was a diversification of services offered, for example, packet data transmission. The quality of the service has considerably improved, with efficiency rates of 50 per cent for local telecommunications, and 45 per cent for inter-urban ones. Telecommunication services accounted for an increase in the Gross National Product, with a regular growth estimated at 2.4 per cent in 1994. During the second reform it was envisaged bringing it up to 3.5 per cent by 2000. In addition, 50 per cent of the village centres were to be equipped with at least one telephone line, with efficiency rates for local telecommunications of 70 per cent and 60 per cent for inter-urban ones. The government has committed itself to promoting the development of a local industry for telecommunication equipment, taking into account the requirements of internal security and national defence.

Opening up to capital investment enabled SONATEL to adapt to an environment that had become competitive. But a large portion of the shares remained in the hands of the State so that it could ensure that the public service tasks were properly carried out. When it gave up part of its share in the capital, the government encouraged the participation of private groups in the monitoring and management of the company. The Telecommunications Code, which

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[2] Decree No. 91-426 of 8 April 1991, nominating ministers.

was voted by the National Assembly on 31 January 1996 (Law No. 96 03 of 22 February 1996) defined categories of monopolies, regulated competition and free competition. The monopoly, conceded to SONATEL by the State, is applied to the fixed telephone network, telex, telegraph and access to the "International" . Regulated competition covers electric radio networks, the government having authorized, in 1997, two private operators, ALIZE and SENTEL, to set up a network of mobile radio-telephones, whose mandates spell out the rights and obligations of the contracting parties.

The cellular network ALIZE covers the main towns and autoroutes of Senegal. Reporters working for the private radio *Sud FM* used it during the local elections of November 1996 and it has grown at an astounding rate. The other competitor, which was officially recognized in April 1999, has reinforced mobile telephone capacity. It is a real revolution in the media field as all the political leaders, both those in power and in the opposition, immediately grasped the advantages of this new gadget. The radio journalist is now freed from the burden of having to make direct sound contact which required a qualified technical team using sophisticated equipment. Moreover, listeners can contact the studio and give their views without the risk of being censored.

Officially Senegal has been connected to the Internet since 1996. That year was a turning point as it was after the very controversial elections of November that the political actors, by demanding the setting up of an electoral file on the Internet, brought together this magic trio that played a determining rôle in ensuring the transparency and authenticity of the vote: the private radio, the mobile phone and the computer. In 1997, Prime Minister Mamadou Lamine Loum readjusted his government's plans accordingly, assigning the *Délégation à l'Informatique* the task of establishing, in 1998-1999, a coherent framework for the promotion of the new information and communication technologies.

Three priorities were set: to get IT recognized by the politicians as a priority ; to remove obstacles preventing projects from having a catalytic effect ; and to help private companies operate in an economic environment favourable to their activities. However, the political approach to the rôle of the new ICT has been only partial, as it only calls for "facilitating the connection of the population to the national media (radio, television), taking into account the specific situation of each locality (community and rural private stations)." (*Ministère du Plan et de la Coopération*, 1997: 113). As for the Ministry of Communication, it only intervened on the question to recall "the importance of the telecommunication sector" in a "Declaration on the policy for developing Senegalese telecommunications". The signatories, the *Ministère du Plan et de la Coopération*, as well as the Communication Minister himself, acknowledged