

Introduction

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<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- the article that you can listen to in the podcast
- an optional comprehension activity based on the article
- links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (health).

Read the article

An HIV / AIDS success story

by Linda Baxter

Number of people living with HIV/AIDS in 2004:
39.4 million
Deaths from Aids in 2004: 4.9 million
Children (under 15) with Aids by end of 2004: 2.2 million
Source: <http://www.avert.org/worldstats.htm>

The West African Republic of Senegal has a population of 10 million (95% Muslim) and there are about 80,000 cases of HIV/AIDS in the country. It seems like a large number but in fact, at about 2% of the population, it's very low in comparison to other countries. And this percentage rate has not increased for the last ten years. The United Nations recognises this success and has named Senegal, the Philippines, Thailand, and Uganda, as countries which have done the most to fight HIV/AIDS.

How has Senegal achieved this?

The political stability of the country over the past few decades has been an important factor. But what other things may have contributed to this success story?

Social and religious values

There is no doubt that social and religious values are an important factor. The Senegalese culture is traditional and religious belief is strong. This means that there is less sexual activity outside of marriage than in many societies. And many young people still believe in the traditional values of no sex before marriage and being faithful to your husband or wife.

Breaking the silence

Many nations in the world have strong religious and social values, but the Senegalese government decided early on that the subject of HIV/AIDS must be discussed openly. Political, religious and community leaders could not treat it

as a taboo subject. This wasn't easy. Speaking openly about the use of condoms means accepting that people may have sex outside of marriage. Religious leaders spoke about HIV/AIDS and condoms in the mosques. They still talked about sexual abstinence and fidelity as the best way to avoid becoming infected, but they also recommended condoms for those people who were not going to abstain from sex.



The National Plan

The National Plan to Fight HIV/AIDS was already in operation in 1987, less than a year after the first cases were diagnosed in Senegal. Its aim was information, education and prevention and it was the first such campaign in Africa. A compulsory class was introduced into the national curriculum in schools. Private companies were encouraged to hold classes for their workers. The government gave the campaign strong support and a regular budget and the religious leaders became strong supporters too. Senegal has a long tradition of local community organisations and there were marches and workshops all over the country. High-risk groups such as sex workers, soldiers and lorry drivers were specially targeted. Women were particularly important in

this process. Senegal recognised that women need more than education and condoms. They need to have the economic and social power to say 'No' to unprotected sex. Many young, popular musicians also became involved in the campaign reaching young people all over the country.

Sex workers

Prostitution was legalised in Senegal in the 1960s. Sex workers were registered and had to have regular medical check-ups. Anyone who was suffering from a sexually transmitted disease was treated free of charge. This system gave Senegal two big advantages in the war on HIV/AIDS. Firstly, it wasn't too difficult to extend the system of testing and treatment to HIV/AIDS. And secondly, the fact that sex workers were registered and known to the authorities meant that it was easy to reach them with education programmes. Many prostitutes themselves became involved in educating other women, and distributing free condoms. Twenty years ago fewer than 1 million condoms were used in Senegal. Now the figure is more than 10 million.

Safe blood

In 1970, Senegal began testing all the donated blood in its blood banks. So, unlike many Western countries, infected blood transfusions never caused the spread of the virus.

International scientists

Senegal has HIV/AIDS scientists who are known

and respected all over the world. Professor Souleymane Mboup, is a world-renowned AIDS researcher. He is most famous for his work on documenting HIV2, a strain of the AIDS virus which is common in West Africa. Professor Mboup is in charge of his country's National AIDS Programme. He co-ordinates the Convention of Research between Senegal and Harvard University in the United States. He also works with the African AIDS Research Network.

The future

So far so good, but Senegal itself knows that it still has a long way to go. The biggest challenge is to hold on to what has already been achieved. Many experts are afraid that this initial success will spread a false sense of security and people will become less careful. One problem is that Senegal is a regional crossroads. Many men go to work in neighbouring countries and return infected with the virus. There is still a great deal of poverty in the country and many people cannot read or write. HIV/AIDS grows well in these conditions. Large numbers of prostitutes are working secretly without registration. Many sex workers cannot afford to refuse customers who don't wear condoms. And if women had more economic power they would not have to turn to prostitution to feed their families in the first place.

So Senegal must continue with the work. And maybe we can all learn a little from what the country has achieved so far.

After reading

Exercise 1

Choose the correct answer to each of the following 8 questions about the text.

1. What 'success' does the United Nations recognise in Senegal?
 - (a) The country has been politically stable for ten years.
 - (b) The country has a low rate of HIV/AIDS infection.
 - (c) The population hasn't increased for ten years.
2. Which of these sentences is true about the Senegalese way of life?
 - (a) There are no prostitutes.
 - (b) People don't have sex if they aren't married.
 - (c) Traditional values are very strong.
3. What did the religious leaders do?
 - (a) They accepted that people may have sex outside of marriage.
 - (b) They treated HIV/AIDS as a taboo subject.
 - (c) They said that using condoms was the best way to avoid infection.

4. When did the National Plan to Fight HIV/AIDS start?
- Soon after the first Senegalese people were infected.
 - When religious leaders started talking about HIV/AIDS.
 - When the national curriculum was changed.
5. Why do women need more social and economic power?
- So that they can educate their children about HIV/AIDS.
 - So that they can choose whether or not to have sex.
 - So that they can distribute condoms.
6. How did the registration of sex workers help in the fight against HIV/AIDS?
- The sex workers had regular medical check-ups.
 - The sex workers all used condoms.
 - The sex workers started an education programme.
7. Who is Professor Mboup?
- A professor at Harvard University.
 - A medical doctor.
 - A scientist who studies HIV/AIDS.
8. What is the biggest danger in Senegal for the future?
- People will forget that HIV/AIDS is still a danger.
 - The government will stop registering sex workers.
 - People will stop using condoms.

More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of health at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-health.htm>

- **Word game: Health.** Practise phrasal verbs connected with health and illness.
- **Word game: Medical services puns.** A pun is an amusing use of a word or phrase which has several meanings or which sounds like another word. Match the beginnings and ends of sentences to make puns.
- **Poem: On Chloris Being Ill:** In this poem (written as a song), the great Scottish poet Robert Burns laments the illness of his loved one.
- **Science: cubed. Artificial breathing:**
A prosthetic lung mimicking our natural lungs could save lives.
- **Science: cubed. Bandaging skin cancer:**
Affordable light-emitting bandage offers easier treatment for common skin cancers.
- **Science: cubed. Cancer eating superbugs.**
Gene technology could be the key to turning a harmful superbug into a lifesaver.
- **Science: cubed. Heart of hope:**
Growing replacement heart valve tissue from stem cells gives hope to heart patients.
- **Science: cubed. Hospital robots:**
A new Scottish hospital plans to employ a staff of super-efficient robots.
- **Science: cubed. Rhythm of life:**
Measuring the 'heartbeat' of living cells offers a safer approach to drug testing.
- **Science: cubed. Robodoc:**
A new surgical robot, the i-Snake, could be a surgeon's hands and eyes.
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about health.
- There is also 7 health-related cartoons, a poll and some carefully selected external links.

Answers to comprehension activity: 1. (b); 2. (c); 3. (a); 4. (a); 5. (b); 6. (a); 7. (c); 8. (a)