

**A LIBRARY FOR THE MAN HOSPITAL: A CONCRETE COMMUNITY PROJECT
TO DEVELOP A DIGITAL INFORMATION BRIDGE INVENTING THE FUTURE**

N'dri Martin Kacou, MD, Resident Surgeon, CHU of Youpugon, Abidjan, Ivory Coast,

ACIM's member ; nkamarti@yahoo.fr, 0022502024148

Bernard Kei, MD, Chief of Pediatric Department, CHR of Man, Ivory Coast, ACIM's president

Jeremie Bodo, nurse, Chief of Emergency Department, CHR of Man, Ivory Coast, ACIM's member

Carlo Montaguti, MD, Chief of Health Centre of Focolari, Man, Ivory Coast,

ACIM's member; carlomegu@aviso.ci

Raffaella Gentilini, Nurse, Medical Coordinator of Action Contre la Faim, Abidjan, Ivory Coast,

Sguazzi's member; raffytata@hotmail.com

Cesare Borin, ICT engineer, Chief of Act Now Alliance, Geneve, Italy; cesare.borin@focolare.org

Mirco Nacoti, MD, Anesthetist, Riuniti Hospital, Bergamo, Italy, Sguazzi's member;

mirco.nacoti@tiscali.it, 00393381338652

Background

The Millennium Development Goals, together with the World Summit on the Information Society invoke to build bridges over digital divides. Satcom technology and knowledge can contribute to achieving education worldwide, especially in areas or regions that have no or a bad infrastructure.

In order to overcome scientific and technologic isolation of the Man hospital, a local group of doctors and nurses become association ACIM and develop a relationship with Sguazzi, an Italian association.

They decide to build a medical-scientific library with access to books and to Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Objective and Methods

The main goal of the project is the promotion of a medical and social sciences development in the Man region and the creation of a cultural exchange. The long term goal is the improving of the health of the Ivorian populations. The project proceeds searching partners from governments, private sector, civil society, regional and international institutions to fund the initiative on main issues allowing long term durability: connectivity, contents, ICT competence, interactivity.

In particular the partnership with [ACT Now Alliance](#) allowed to be chosen by European Spacial Agency, as project activity to be followed and evaluated during 2009 and will allow free access to satellite for three years.

The construction of an effective divulgative action represents the way to realize a reliable partnership and to explore critical dimensions that lie inside the project. To improve the impact and the understanding of the project, the communication mix scientific and artistic languages.

Conclusion

The starting point for any political discussion about digital divide and role of ICT to overcome it, must be focused on the contribution these technologies could offer to poverty reduction, with the awareness that access to them does not produce only an accumulation of information, but strongly contributes to the creation of psychic geographies.

Background of the “A library for the hospital of Man” Project

Doctors without Borders (MSF), an humanitarian medical organisation, had taken charge the Man hospital, Ivory Coast, from 2003 to 2007 because all the health personnel had been driven away by a civil war. Humanitarian action, defined as “actively engagement in promoting human welfare and social reforms” (1), is a Doctor's duty, and MSF is a dynamic and independent organisation profoundly committed to achieving this goal.

One of the main difficulty during this period, was the creation of professional relationships of respect and collaboration, because the Ivorian colleagues were undergoing an enormous information gap. All doctors coming from overseas had access to information communication technology (ICT), while the local doctors had not even a book.

The information gap between rich and poor countries is so huge that it's been argued that “providing access to reliable health information for health workers in developing countries is potentially the single most cost effective and achievable strategy for sustainable improvement in health care.”(2)

The revolution of information represents an opportunity to change for the world: the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) - <http://www.fsfeurope.org/projects/wsis/wsis.en.html> - recognized that ICT can have a key role for the construction of a fair information society and to reach the eight objectives of the Millenium (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>).

In this picture, the United Nations' General Secretary, Kofi Annan, launched in 2000 the Health InterNetwork in the Millennium Action Plan, “as a concrete demonstration of how we can build bridges over digital divides (3),” but the funds to be raised never materialised (4).

MSF don't promote ICT and leaved Man on the 2007 at the end of war. A little Organisation of volunteers, “Sguazzi”- (www.sguazzi.com) - of Bergamo, Italy, help Ivorian doctors.

Sguazzi was born ten years ago to help disabled people, and seeks for efficient solutions with the aim to reduce environmental and social barriers that limit people participation, taking inspiration from the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (**ICF**) classification, officially approved by 191 members of World health Organization in 2001

(<http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/>).

In order to overcome scientific and technologic isolation reported by the medical staff of Man hospital, it arose the idea to build a medical-scientific library with access to books and to Information and Communication Technology (ICT). A local group of doctors and nurses trusted this possibility to invent the future and became association ACIM: Association Culturelle Informatique et Médical. The project “A library for the Man hospital” comes from this mutual willing of two groups of the society. The library was opened on the September 1st, 2004.

Objective

The main medium term goal of the “A library for the Man hospital “project is the promotion of a medical and social sciences development in the Man region and the creation of a national (into the Ivory Coast) and international cultural exchange. The long term goal is the improving of the health of the Ivorian populations.

The action objective is to introduce ICT tools contribute to alleviating the national and international community isolation and to enhance the community local capacity building in the education, health and governance sectors by means of:

- give communities communication tools to improve the capacity for they themselves to shape their own future;
- improve knowledge and capacity building in ICT tools to offer more local employment opportunity with the objective of reducing emigration to urban centres

and abroad, with special attention given to employment of young women(5) in line with the local possibilities;

- enhance the quality of local medical service and diagnostic capacity by improving the diagnostic means to respond to health emergencies, AIDS, malaria, children's malnutrition and maternal health;
- introduce low cost communication solutions really compatible with economical situation

Search of partners and communication are the two cornerstones of the project for these goals to be reached.

Partnership

The project proceeds carefully searching good partners (local, national, international - http://www.bibliotechman.org/sguazzi_partners.htm), to fund the initiative on six main issues, as suggested by Health InterNetwork India project (4), Hynari experience (5) and the Canadian Ptolemy project (6):

- connectivity (facilitating information access and use through ICT): The project proposal consists in the installation in Man of 1 Centre equipped with DVB-RCS satellite stations and wireless connectivity distribution (fig 1).
- content (providing timely, relevant, and high quality information): second opinion consultations local professional health staff instruction, personal and professional training of the local health and social workers.
- capacity building (developing skills in ICT management and use): Organizing local training courses with European and African teachers using technologies.
- policy (lowering the barriers to ICT integration into public health practice): the hospital director and the regional director approved the project. We're waiting the Health minister approval.

- interactivity on the internet (allowing to become producers of information)
- identification and support to local champions (for improving ICT awareness and for gaining support at higher administrative and policy levels).

A.C.I.M and Sguazzi developed some crucial partnerships. In particular the partnership with **ACT Now Alliance**, that directly deals with ICT access.

ACT Now Alliance is an Alliance of No-Profit Associations and other Civil Society components that is born with the aim to contribute to the fact that people can take advantage from opportunities that ICT offers.

"A library for Man hospital" was chosen by the society held by European Spatial Agency (ESA), of which Act Now Alliance is member, as project activity to be followed and evaluated during 2009, within phase 4 of **CBICT** project (Capacity Building through ICT: the Satcom element) -

<http://telecom.esa.int/telecom/www/object/index.cfm?fobjectid=28865> -. For this reason it will take advantage of free access to satellite for three years.

30000 euros will be used to purchase all the necessary technologic components.

This ICT strategy should contribute to reduce "the information gap" avoiding the irreversible digital divide (6) and allowing long term durability.

Communication

To improve the impact and the understanding of the project a special communication action is scheduled. This action will be mixing scientific and artistic languages.

Also for this reason the project received the "Takunda 2008" award

(http://cesvi.it/?pagina=pagina_generica.php&id=1613), in "Bergamo for the world" category.

In particular, we do believe that theatre, some sort of it, could be an overall engagement experience proposal, a perceptive, physical, emotional, intellectual engagement, far beyond the logic-rational comprehension of data and figures.

What we realized should be a performance of gestures, words, sounds, smells, to perceptively bomb the public.

Medicine itself seems to move this way when its professionals are asked to develop narrative capacities, and these capacities are said to be fundamentally therapeutic acts, leading to a better understanding of the special story of every single patient, and to authentically share his suffering (7).

Future

The development of partnerships between those responsible for the information infrastructures and the representatives of the society is a recognised method to bridge global information (8) and effectively may help a region of the Ivory Coast, after a civil war, invent a future of a better governance, economies and health (9).

The communication side of the project should improve the narrative competence of doctors and people involved and their relevant capacity to meet the real needs of a community, contributing to promote social reforms.

As for the activities planning, the involvement of a local organisation like “Sguazzi” should guarantee a proper, careful and cautious evolution of the project, allowing a real involvement of the local Ivorian community.

We’re waiting the installation of the DVB-RCS satellite stations on the April 2009 to start training and interactivity on internet.

The parabolic antenna will at Focolari Centre in Man – other crucial partnership - and will be wireless connected to the library in Man hospital. The Focolari Centre was equipped with an informatics laboratory for the training and youthful education that will take advantage of the antenna; local experts will provide its correct and continuous functioning. The lab development constitutes integrating part of CBICT Project.

Discussion and Conclusion

"A library for Man hospital" proposes the construction of a medical-scientific library with Internet access through satellite technology, in Man, that is situated in the 18 Mountains region of Ivory Coast, one of the more upset by recent civil war, inhabited by about 1 million people.

The project is born in Africa, but then tries to work on topics like iniquity and social injustice as regards any person, in order to undermine clichés and go back to the root of problems, as well as to individual choices responsibility.

ICTs need to be aligned and linked to development strategies aimed to poverty reduction

Only putting all interested actors together (governments, private sector, civil society, regional and international institutions) in one global network, as indicated in the WSIS, the ICTs could be led to express their full potential.

The construction of an effective divulgative action represents the way to realize a reliable partnership and to explore critical dimensions and meaning that lie inside the project.

The starting point for any political discussion about digital divide and role of ICT to overcome it, must be focused on the contribution these technologies could offer to poverty reduction and to a sustainable development, with the awareness that access to them does not produce only a more or less regular accumulation of information, but strongly contributes to the creation of psychic geographies, those more and more complex cognitive maps, necessary for location and movement in an interconnected space of the globalized contemporaneity (11, 12).

It's difficult to explain why a farmer in Afghanistan or in Ivory Coast is more vulnerable than a family in New Orleans that just lost everything after Hurricane.

We think that the "A library for the hospital of Man" project has potentially three original features: it takes into consideration other similar experiences (4, 5, 6), it pays a lot of attention to the communication action and requires a direct involvement of the civil society.

We will be carrying on monitoring the development of the project, so that emerging merits and limits will be clearly identified.

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