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EN AFRIQUE

CESAG Information and Dissemination Activities: Assessment and Strategies for Development

by

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January 1998





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INTRODUCTION

During the period December 3-13, 1997, a technical assistance visit was made to CESAG (Le Centre Africain d'Etudes Supérieures en Gestion), a regional management training institute located in Dakar Senegal. This consultancy was carried out in response to CESAG's request to SARA for assistance in assessing the institution's current capabilities in information and dissemination and developing strategies for future information activities, particularly in the area of health management.

The SARA information management consultant worked in collaboration with Dr. Narcisse de Medeiro, SARA's on-site health management consultant to CESAG, with activities during the technical assistance visit coordinated by Ms. Laurence Codjia, head of CESAG's health services management training program. Of further note is that throughout the visit, the director-general of CESAG, Mr. Lansina Bakary, participated extensively in discussions of potential future information and dissemination activities.

BACKGROUND

Originally created by the CEAO (Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest), CESAG is a post-university training institute offering degrees and short-term training in general management sciences as well as business and financial management and health services management. After the dissolution of the CEAO in 1994, CESAG was moved to the institutional aegis of BCEAO (Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest). This change in institutional sponsorship, which formally began in November 1995, is significant for the reorganization and revitalization strategies that CESAG has been pursuing these past two years. In addition to strengthening and expanding training programs, CESAG is emphasizing its consulting and research activities. The development of new information and dissemination activities is intended to both support and be an integral part of the overall changes being instituted by CEASAG.

Serving as the headquarters of a regional network of management training institutions (Réseau d'Institutions de Formation à la Gestion), CESAG considers one of its primary missions to be collaboration with and support of network members. It is in this context that the idea arose of creating a multi-media information and documentation center that would provide information and dissemination services to CESAG staff

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and students as well as to regional network members and managers in the private and public sectors, including the health service sector.

To initiate this center, CESAG proposes to bring its various units currently engaged in information activities into a coordinated, if not combined, functional program.

CURRENT STATUS OF CESAG INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

There are currently four functional units within CESAG charged with various information-related activities: the library, the audio-visual center, the photocopying service and the computer center. Marketing activities are not based in any one division or program although most queries on CESAG programs come into the Office of Scholastic Services.

Currently, there is only one staff member per each of the information-related units, a situation that clearly constrains current activities and that will be a key factor in any strategy to develop and expand information and dissemination services in the future. Despite the skeleton staffing, the audio-visual, photocopying and computer centers appear to be making considerable efforts to meet user needs; the library is singularly problematic and in most dire need of revitalization.

The Audio-Visual Center:

The audio-visual center is well equipped but its resources are considered to be under-utilized, particularly by CESAG faculty. When requested, the center provides various types of teaching- and learning-aid support to CESAG faculty and students but the heaviest use of the audio-visual center comes from external sources that rent the studio, equipment and auditorium for varied activities. Also, the audio-visual center has been extensively involved in distance learning projects, both preparing materials and devising technological strategies, in collaboration with a number of North American universities. An additional role the center plays is in the area of public relations, organizing press conferences and developing a network of media contacts.

The Photocopying Service:

The photocopying unit provides services to all CESAG faculty, staff and students. This is a very heavily used service, which, despite recent equipment upgrades, is still lacking in some basic peripheral equipment and supplies which would increase the work flow and heighten the quality of its products. The service also has difficulty managing its work flow because of the disorganized manner in which it receives requests. In theory, all requests are supposed to be given to the service within a reasonable advance time but the frequency of "urgent" requests is sufficient to disrupt daily work schedules. There appears to be a lack of distinction by users between truly urgent needs and those that result merely from poor planning. The latter also figure prominently in the recurrent problem of a large run of copies having to be redone because of corrections and editing carried out after the original photocopying request has been submitted. The implications of this problem will need to be taken into consideration if CESAG proceeds with plans to expand the photocopying service to include in-house printing facilities.

The Computer Center:

The computer center has been operating under both staffing and equipment constraints. The near-term goals being pursued include providing sufficient equipment to CESAG staff and installation of a LAN; expanding the student computer labs and subsequently using these labs to offer fee-based courses for external clients; expanding and enhancing Internet connectivity. It would be difficult to understate the wide and pressing need for computer and Internet services expressed by CESAG staff and students, however most faculty members have apparently not evidenced the same level of interest. The imminent acquisition of new equipment should satisfy most needs of the staff, many of whom are anxious to begin streamlining work with LAN capabilities and to have convenient access to e-mail, which currently can be sent and collected from only one computer with an Internet connection. Whether or not student needs will be met with the expanded computer labs remains to be seen; while some CESAG staff are of the opinion that students may be lacking in the background that would induce interest in computers and the Internet, a very different picture emerged from a focus group discussion with students who expressed not only interest and need but also some innate understanding of how Internet capabilities might be exploited for their information needs.

Current Status

The Library:

The library, for the most part, can be characterized as a moribund service. It is still used by faculty and students but there have been no acquisitions of basic materials for the past ten years. Documents distributed free of charge, e.g., certain World Bank publications, represent the only current information received by the library and the sources from which the library obtains these documents are not extensive. The library has no equipment of any kind, neither computers nor microform readers. There is a card catalog but its value is limited because the collection is not well organized physically; also, a significant number of titles from the collection, possibly as many as two thousand, have gone missing over the years, a problem invited by the library's lack of a circulation system of any kind. This situation understandably does not inspire trust and therefore many materials received by CESAG training programs and departments (e.g., documents from various projects collaborating with the health services management program) are not placed in the library for use by students. The one area of library responsibility that appears to be adequately carried out is the maintenance of CESAG's institutional archives. The archives were used extensively when the BCEAO took over CESAG and are also used occasionally by CESAG's administrative offices. Although this may represent a limited pool of users, their needs are obviously essential in operating the institution and the library is fulfilling an important role by meeting those needs.

STRATEGIES FOR FUTURE CESAG INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

Definition of Functions:

Generally stated, the functions of CESAG's proposed Multi-Media Information and Documentation Center would be:

- ♦ to collect and organize information materials in various formats (paper, microform, audio-visual and electronic media);
- ♦ to provide access to these materials as well as to other sources of information available outside of the Center, in particular Internet resources;

- ♦ to produce information products, through repackaging of existent materials and development of new products resulting from research and consulting activities;
- ♦ to disseminate the information products produced by CESAG and its partner institutions.

An additional role that should be considered for the Center is to make it the focal point for public relations and marketing activities for CESAG.

The overall purpose of the Center would be to meet the information needs of its users by providing materials and services that will support their activities, including learning, research, management, policy development and advocacy.

Definition of User Categories:

The Center's potential users can be broadly divided into the two major categories of internal and external users. Internal users would include CESAG staff, faculty and students. While the definition of external users would require research to precisely define this audience, it can, at this time, be generally assumed to consist of partner institutions at the national, regional and international levels, and key organizations and individuals engaged in management research and reform throughout the region.

It should be noted that CESAG's faculty and students should be considered in both the internal and external user categories – faculty, because the majority of them have institutional affiliations other than CESAG, and students because they graduate to external user status upon completion of their studies. The faculty and students can be seen as potentially forming the backbone of the Center's user network; their impression of, and satisfaction with, the Center's information services will greatly influence their long-term use of the Center as well as how positively they portray the Center to their colleagues in various institutions.

Also having a combined internal and external user status will be the consultants and researchers contracted by CESAG to carry out studies, in keeping with the institution's renewed emphasis on these types of activi-

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ties. Again, meeting the information needs of these individuals is likely to have an effect beyond the consultants and researchers themselves; adequate information support and services should enhance the quality, and therefore potentially the impact, of their end products.

The points about internal and external user status have been made to highlight the importance of taking various factors into consideration when defining the Center's potential users and audience and when planning and prioritizing information services. User and audience research should be the first step taken to develop an action plan for Center operations as it will define not only the information needs the Center will be trying to meet but also the most efficient manner in which to offer information services.

User and Audience Research:

For CESAG staff, faculty and students, it is already clear that an orientation and outreach program on information services will be needed; this program should be developed on the basis of these users' attitudes and experiences with both traditional information resources and those available through modern technology.

For the broader external audience, research needs to be done on the dissemination experiences and capabilities of CESAG's partners in the regional network of management training institutions in order to determine what role these institutions can play in the Center's dissemination activities and what support they may need to actively participate in these activities. Further, a review should be done of other relevant existent networks: their communications capabilities (especially Internet access), their experience in disseminating information (through the postal services, at meetings or electronically) and the availability of their mailing lists.

This type of user and audience research should enable the Center to develop its own mailing lists, for both print and electronic dissemination, which are coded to indicate specific subject areas of interest and need. The amount of time and effort required to develop and maintain mailing lists should not be underestimated. This is not a task that can be reasonably assigned to someone with an extensive amount of other duties and it should not be considered a strictly secretarial function. As a general guideline, the responsibility for mailing lists should be viewed as a crucial

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part of dissemination activities and therefore should be assigned to someone with both the time and capability to adequately carry out the task.

Dissemination Methods:

User and audience research will provide some guidance on how the Center should balance its dissemination methods between electronic and traditional means. The status of electronic connectivity throughout the region is changing rapidly but access is likely to remain very unevenly distributed for some time to come. If the Center opted for strictly electronic dissemination, it is fair to say that it would be ignoring the needs of a large part, if not the majority, of its audience. Relying exclusively on traditional means of dissemination (e.g., the postal services) would leave the Center on the sidelines of the global information flow, not a position any institution in the midst of developing and defining itself can rationally choose to be in at this time. The Center therefore has the responsibility, both to itself and its users, to develop a mix of dissemination methods that simultaneously meet information needs and insure inclusion in the evolution of global communications.

Deciding what may be the best mix of dissemination methods will present the Center with perhaps its most difficult challenge. For each information product, or at least series of products, to be disseminated, the target audience for the product will have to be defined and decisions made on the best means for reaching that audience. Materials considered to be of essential importance may warrant a multi-pronged dissemination approach, which, it should be noted, is inevitably labor-intensive. For example, if a research study sponsored by CESAG produces important results with potentially wide applications, the study would need to be made available in print form as a well-edited and well-produced document. In addition to distributing this document to a targeted mailing list, opportunities should be sought for presenting the study at national, regional and international meetings of relevant experts; in this case, the document cannot be relied upon to simply speak for itself but rather must be supplemented with a well-prepared presentation program. The document can further be made available in electronic form, with its full contents archived on a CESAG Web site. Also, the document would need to be publicized, perhaps by distributing summaries of the material in both print and electronic form.

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All of the information products disseminated by the Center will not necessarily require such a thorough approach; some may be adequately disseminated by selecting, or emphasizing, only one method. However, what will be required is that Center has sufficient human resource capability to make informed and rational decisions about each and every one of the information products it intends to disseminate.

Planning the Development of the CESAG Multi-Media Information and Documentation Center:

Currently, the CESAG Multi-Media Information and Documentation Center is an idea and intention in need of specific planning to bring it into reality. None of the current CESAG staff engaged in various information-related activities has either the time or the specific expertise required to launch the Center. There is therefore a clear need to bring in an information services expert (initially perhaps as a contracted consultant) to carry out the user and audience research recommended above, to work out a detailed plan and proposal for developing the Center and to assist the CESAG administration in seeking funding support for the Center.

This information services expert should work in collaboration with the staff of each of the existent information-related units in identifying future roles, responsibilities and personnel requirements. More broadly, consideration should be given to allowing the expert to form a working group within CESAG that includes all of the information-related units as well as representatives from the training programs, faculty, administrative staff and possibly students. In particular, CESAG's Institute for Languages would be an excellent candidate for inclusion in this working group since it has launched a number of innovative initiatives to revitalize its program and services.

The profile of the type of expert required to carry out planning for the Center would include substantial experience in:

- ♦ information and dissemination services;
- ♦ development of documentation and resource centers;
- ♦ development of information networks;

- ◆ assessment of information needs;
- ◆ research on information service users and audiences;
- ◆ use of both traditional and modern technologies to provide information services.

Although these requirements are rather extensive, it should not be an unrealistic task to identify potential candidates. There is an impressive pool of talent available in the region and it can most efficiently be identified through the IDRC Regional Office located in Dakar. [Specific contact information is provided at the end of this report.] Because IDRC has a long history of being at the leading edge of research and development in the information field, the alumni of its training programs and projects constitute a particularly skilled and innovative group.

The Health Services Management Program Dissemination Activities:

Concurrent with the need to move ahead with planning the start-up of the Multi-Media Information and Documentation Center is the particular need of the Health Services Management Program to initiate dissemination activities. With its numerous collaborating project and institutional partners, the program has been exploring its potential role in the dissemination of health management information. Although eventually these activities would be carried out by the Center once it is operational, there may be substantial benefits to be gained if the Health Services Management Program were to begin its own dissemination activities in the near future as it would be able to provide the future Center with a prototype experience.

In order to launch dissemination activities, clearly the program would need the assistance of an information consultant, preferably one with expertise in health documentation and dissemination. The tasks to be carried out by this consultant would be the same as those recommended for the start-up of the Center but with a specific focus on health management: user and audience research, investigating existent relevant networks, developing mailing lists and determining a mix of traditional and

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modern dissemination methods. By working with collaborating partners to determine what information materials should be distributed, in what forms and by which methods, the Health Services Management Program would be in a position to maximize the resources currently available, which, because of the various timetables and internal requirements of donor-funded projects, are of a finite duration.

Waiting for the development of the Multi-Media Information and Documentation Center to undertake any dissemination activities may mean that the Health Services Management Program, and CESAG itself, would miss an important opportunity to both gain experience and build its reputation as an information provider.

Revitalization of the Library:

In addition to the Health Services Management Program, another point of specific need and consideration is the library. The reorganization and revitalization of the library will require the services of an expert with somewhat different qualifications than those outlined for the Center's planning and the Health Services Management Program. The library expert should have a strong background in outreach and user services as well as experience in collection development, organization and management. The expert should be able to provide assistance in:

- ♦ identifying sources of new materials for the collection;
- ♦ determining what materials should be acquired;
- ♦ articulating a solid proposal for creating a regular, line-item budget for acquisitions;
- ♦ selecting software for computerizing the library catalog;
- ♦ devising input formats and indexing guidelines for the catalog;
- ♦ initiating the computerized catalog with data on new acquisitions;

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- ◆ developing a long-term plan for weeding and converting the old collection, including computerized catalog entries and physical reorganization of the collection;
- ◆ developing a simple, but adequate, circulation system;
- ◆ developing contacts and formal exchange agreements with local and regional libraries and other information facilities;
- ◆ developing research and reference guides for users;
- ◆ identifying external sources of research and reference information, particularly Internet resources;
- ◆ creating and testing outreach services and orientation programs for students, faculty and staff.

Although the library will be a key component of the Multi-Media Information and Documentation Center, its revitalization alone should not be considered adequate to launch the Center's activities. Any role the library will have in the Center's documentation and dissemination activities, beyond its traditional functions of providing research and reference support, will have to be determined through the broader planning process for development of the Center.

Appendices

NOTES

For assistance in identifying potential candidates from the West African region for consulting positions in information services planning and management, contact:

Alioune Camara
Information Programs Director
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Appendix B

CONTACTS

In collaboration with Dr. Narcisse de Madeiro, SARA health management consultant, interviews and discussions were held with the following CESAG staff and faculty:

Mr. Lansina BAKARY
Director-General of CESAG

Ms. Laurence CODJIA
Head of the Health Services Management Program

Mr. Léon SARR
Head of the Library

Mr. Jérôme BASSENE
Head of the Computer Center

Mr. Lamine FALL
Head of the Audio-Visual Center

Mr. Alpha DIALLO
Head of the Photocopying Service

Mr. Lamine SY
Head of the Language and International Communication Institute

Mr. BOSSA
Head of the International Audit Program

Ms. SANON
Head of Scholastic Services

Ms. COULIBALY

Head of the Department of Administration and Finance

Mr. Paulin GNOKOBLE

Material Resources Supervisor, Department of Administration and Finance

Mr. Alioune N'DIAYE

Professor, Health Services Management Program

Ms. TALL

Administrative Assistant to the Director-General

FOCUS GROUP: eight second-year students in the Health Services Management Program