

Idania Carrillo

East High School

Des Moines, IA, USA

Senegal, Childbirth Education

Senegal: Improving Education on Child Births

Senegalese are having lots of babies! But what's wrong with having babies? Senegal is well known to have one of the highest fertility rates in the world but is it really an issue? Let us find out.

Senegal is a small state located at the westernmost point of the African continent and is known as the “Gateway to Africa” (Britannica). Senegal has a tropical, hot humid climate and terrains that are generally low, rolling, plains (CIA World Factbook). When viewing the history of Senegal one can see that Senegal was never quite independent. In the 8th century, Senegal was part of the Ghana empire, the first great medieval trading empires in Western Africa, and the Djolof Kingdom during the 13th and 14th centuries. Although nothing is really known about the Ghana’s empire political history, only some written references to this empire are those of Arabic geographers and historians from the 8th century. The Ghana empire was certainly rich and powerful due to the productions of gold, ivory, and the trading of salt. Senegal used to be part of the early European contacts where countries which include England, France, Portugal, and the Netherlands, strategically searched for slaves and the lands resources (Lonely Planet). As stated by Abdoukhaman Niang, who is a resident of Podor, Senegal, The French set up trading posts in Podor and later in 1848, after the ban of slavery, the French changed Podor into an agricultural colony to raise African goods. The French would use Podor’s products in exchange for manufactured goods. The trading posts were later closed in 1960 after asphalt took over the river,roads. (Night and Day Documentaries). In the late 19th century, Senegal fell under French control in 1659. The French had rebuilt trading factories where they bought slaves, gold, and gum arabic in the region. As stated by Ousmane Diallo, who is a resident of Saint Louis, the population is made up of whites, blacks, and mulattos. The female slaves often became lovers of their masters (Night and Day Documentaries). Later in 1960, Senegal gained independence when Léopold Senghor became the leader (Encyclopedia Britannica). Senegal has a presidential republic government with a civil law system that is based on French law (CIA World Factbook). Currently, the president of Senegal is Macky Sall who has been president since April 2012. Senegal has been controlled by several large countries for several years. Since Senegal gained independence, they have been trying to improve everyday life, society, government, economy, health, and more.

An issue that Senegal has, is their large population in a small amount of land. Currently, Senegal has an approximate land size of 196,722 sq km equivalent to 76,000 mi² (Countries and their Culture). To help picture this size; it is relatively around the same area of land as South Dakota or Nebraska (States Symbols USA). Although Senegal, South Dakota, and Nebraska have roughly around the same land area, Senegal has a much larger population, more than South Dakota and Nebraska’s populations combined. As of August 31st, 2020, Senegal’s population is 16,822,120 (World O Meter). The average family size consists of nine people possibly due to the simple desire of a large family or the need for help on family farms. The youth will also marry at a very young age which allows a lot of time to reproduce and start a family. The average farm size is between 1.5 - 2.4 hectares, which is equivalent to 3.7 - 5.9 acres (Scaling up Responsible Land Governance). According to World O Meter, the population is increasing about 3% each year.

According to the CIA World factbook, when looking at Senegal's total land, 46.8% is classified agricultural land, 43.8% is classified forests, and 9.4% is classified as other. Senegal exports phosphates, cotton, fish, rice, peanuts, poultry products, petroleum products and more to their main trading partners, Mali, India, UAE, and others. In urban areas, families tend to grow small amounts of fruits/vegetables and marketplaces are more common in these urban areas, so they also buy and trade goods in the markets. Since rural areas have less access to markets, they raise products on small farms where they practice sustainable farming to provide for themselves. The main job in Senegal is working in agriculture. Senegal prohibits child labor, so children tend to go to school and help on family farms. Some common dishes include thiéboudienne which is rice served with a fish and vegetable sauce; yassa au poulet or yassa au poisson which is grilled chicken or fish in an onion and lemon sauce; and mafé. a peanut-based stew (Britannica). Both men and women tend their fields and livestock, if they have any, but men will normally be the ones to go fishing by the river. Fish is the most dominant food source in Senegal because there is a shortage of livestock and as stated by Ousmane Diallo, a resident of Saint Louis, Senegal, "No more farming no more cattle raising. The only real economic activity is fishing." He goes on by explaining that, when there is lots of fish in the sea, that is the time that life sprouts in Senegal. It is the time when people most get together, celebrate traditions and baptism. The larger the population becomes, the more food must be produced in order to provide for everyone, which would lead to exhaustion of the soil to provide for the rapidly growing population. It is crucial to take steps that reduce childbirths in order to solve the major issue of high fertility rates.

Apart from the seeming to be food shortage and the lack of land for the people, there are still many other challenges that Senegal faces. According to the CIA World Factbook, 1,200 sq km of the total land in Senegal is irrigated land, which means, only 0.6% of the land has access to water flow; the rest of the land must rely on the rain. In the urban area, 92.9% of the population has access to clean drinking water, while in the rural areas, 67.3% of the population has access to clean drinking water. In the urban area, 65.4% of the population has access to proper sanitation, while in rural areas, only 33.8% of the population has access to proper sanitation. Over 6 million people, generally in rural areas, have little to no access to electricity. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, in rural areas, houses are made of straw, which means straw walls and straw roofs, these homes can be transported when needed. Others decide to build their homes using earth. In urban areas or the more prosperous areas, the houses are a made of cement or cement brick and have roofs made of corrugated iron or tile. According to the CIA World Factbook, education expenditure is 4% of GDP with a literacy rate of 51.9%. Which means that very few are fortunate to receive some type of education. Families in rural areas have less access to school and other necessities such as health services, this is due to the risks and dangers of traveling and maybe even more so, there is an insignificant amount of money that the government puts towards healthcare (5.5%).

After understanding the troubles that the people in Senegal must face, it appears that having a lot of babies may not be "bad" in itself, but because of all these other issues, it becomes much more difficult to raise a family and the bigger the family, the harder it is. Thankfully there are people, who are fighting to improve these conditions in Senegal such as Fatoumata Fall, a member of the Réseau Siggil Jigeen R an NGO that promotes and protects women's rights. There is a case where she has helped a young woman who dropped out of school, when she became pregnant and disowned by her family, by communicating with the municipal authorities for assistance. They were able to provide her with moral and financial support enabling her to receive prenatal care. They also helped her resume her education after having her child (inter press service). There is also a program called USAID which helps provide easier access to proper education by building schools and providing training for teachers and even providing supplies and books for the students (USAID). Another program that has been very helpful is a program called "Feed The Future", which has allowed Senegalese access to better technologies and even better seeds for harvest

(Feed the future). Overall, the Republic of Senegal has made several steps in improving society, economy, and education but one major issue is still high fertility rates.

Several issues correspond to the problem of high total fertility rates. High fertility rates is a major issue as they come with more serious issues, which include, infant mortality and maternal mortality. According to the CIA World Factbook, infant mortality rates are high at 45.7 deaths per 1,000 live births, maternal mortality rates are high at 315 deaths per 1,000 live births, and total fertility rates are high at 4.04 children per woman. Even though birth education is not great, the community has improved. Some major improvements that have occurred are that maternal mortality rates have gone down from 401 to 315 and the total fertility rate has gone down from 6.6 children born in 1990 to 4.04 children born (CIA World Factbook). According to NPR, pregnancies were often hidden and unspoken of openly or socially. During recent years, this has changed, elders and pregnant women would gather and women were asked questions and elders gave advice. This has helped women reduce casualties and gain more trust with each other. The numbers are still high and have decreased slightly but this shows that the community is taking steps in the right direction.

There are several major contributors to this issue including the lack of education and knowledge over health and pregnancy prevention. A survey showed that only 5% of women use birth control and only 30% of men have used protection before but many do not regularly use protection as access to these resources are very minimal (Inter Press Service). These surveys revealed that the community is uneducated over the importance of contraceptives. Another major contributor is the cultural belief around being pregnant. According to Diouma Tine of Inter Press Service, "If you're married, then you must have children, if you don't, then you don't get to stay in your husband's house, and no one will respect you". This culture pushes and encourages women to have children. Many families living in rural areas tend to have many children so they can help and work on family farms.

Due to the distribution of people in rural areas, it is difficult for people to have access to nearby hospitals and professional medical assistance. Adding to this, the lack of med-education has been linked to infant death rates because of an incorrect dosage of prescription drugs by undereducated doctors. Inter Press Service stated that, women in Senegal have confessed that they do not feel welcomed into government clinics. The National Agency of Statistics and Demography's (2011) health indicators report found that 90% of women in urban areas have a birth in the presence and assistance of a skilled attendant but less than 45% of women in rural areas have skilled assistance due to the lack of knowledge and transportation to hospitals. Rural areas have a notable disadvantage in health services: bumpy and long roads make it difficult to reach hospitals.

High fertility rates do not only affect one person but a whole community. Women are majorly affected because they are the ones going through labor, care for the babies, and sometimes die. Many newborn babies are also affected because they die due to the lack of sanitation in the environment or drug overdoses. They are also affected because some mothers pass away from diseases or over dosages, leaving the infant motherless. Elders are also affected because they assist the young woman with health care, *bajeny gox* (NPR). Since grandmothers and mothers-in-laws decide major decisions, in terms of health, they may feel responsible for a death of child and/or mother. Most elders encourage family planning which has helped decrease high total fertility rates. Since women and children are mostly at risk, fathers will carry a burden if their significant other or child passes.

One potential step that could solve the total fertility rate issue could be encouraging Sex Education in schools and among communities. Sex Education is a class where teens and young adults learn about pregnancies and resources that prevent pregnancies. Since only a small percentage of Senegal has access to education, spreading this knowledge through elders and in churches, which stated by Ansoumana

Madja Islam is the dominant religion, is an essential task. This will allow the communities in both rural and urban areas to have access to this knowledge. Before any decisions are made, it is also important to consider the culture that “women must have children to be respected”, the desire of large families, and that women do not feel comfortable in government-run clinics. An issue that may occur is that parents and guardians may disagree with these classes causing conflicts. In order to prevent this issue, a survey can be filled out by parents to state if they do or do not want their child to take part in the sex education class. After all results are in, required classes could be added to the school for those who are allowed to take this course. The sex education course will teach teens about sex, the responsibilities that follow pregnancies, and different ways to access resources that prevent pregnancies including condoms, birth control, and more. In order for teens to learn, educated teachers are essential. Two organizations that can help provide education include UNICEF and Aid for Africa. UNICEF is an organization that can provide free education and Aid for Africa is an organization that provides teachers that can teach teens, elders, and other communities over sex, ways to prevent pregnancies, and the importance of family planning. Since some women feel comfortable around and trust elders, they are more likely to feel encouraged to use protection and minimize the birth of children. The classes and elder's advice can encourage teens to have fewer children when they mature, lowering the fertility rate in Senegal.

Another potential step that could solve the fertility rate issue is to make resources, such as clinics and protection, more accessible. Providing resources, such as condoms, at lower prices will allow minority groups to have more access to resources allowing them to have fewer children without spending little to no money. Access to these resources and benefits could be difficult for people who live in rural areas due to transportation. Bumpy and long roads can cause people to have less access to resources since many people may believe that the hassle is unsuitable. Building several resource facilities throughout the rural community would be costly, which the government would most likely disapprove of since little amounts of families would have access to those facilities. In order to make resources more accessible, organizations and the government would need to work together to provide affordable resources to the community. Organizations could contribute through donations of condoms, birth control, etc. For example, Senegal could partner with FC2, a company that provides female condoms, to provide affordable condoms to the community. Senegal could also work with the World Health Organization (WHO) to build modern and sanitary hospitals and clinics. The donations could be given to clinics that would give donations to the community for free. The government could also contribute through providing more resources, encouraging the community to take advantage of affordable protection, and having the willingness to make less profit since the government would not make much profit from these resources since they are low-priced. Education and accessibility go hand-in-hand, education gives the community knowledge on where to find resources and accessibility of affordable resources can cause people to take action. Making resources affordable can improve the total fertility rate issue by eliminating the excuse of not having accessibility to resources.

The process of lowering the fertility rate in Senegal will be a slow process, but with the support of the community and the solutions, the final goal can be reached. In order to take steps in the right direction, the community must be willing to contribute. Without the support from communities, nothing will change. If people continuously ignore the high fertility rate issue, Senegal will continue to have a high fertility rate. If the community takes advantage of the education and accessibility to resources, Senegal will prosper and improve. Through continuing to gain knowledge, and take advantage of affordable resources, the fertility decrease project will be sustainable. Currently, Senegal has a high fertility rate due to the lack of education on childbirths and desire for large families. Many aspects contribute to this issue including culture, farm families, and more but if the community, government, and organizations work together, this issue could be solved. Providing education and providing affordable resources can help

improve Senegal because these proposals can encourage the communities of Senegal to have fewer children. Ideas are just ideas until actions are taken, therefore acting now rather than later is essential.

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