

**Telecenters in Africa:
Between the pursuit of financial sustainability and the success in
the social function: Yam Pukri experiences in Burkina Faso**

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Abstract

The Community telecenters started in Burkina Faso in 1998 with the current of the fight against poverty and the numerical fracture.

Classified among the poorest countries of planet and a very weak teledensity (1 per 100) Burkina Faso tries to fit in the overall cyber village by multiple governmental, private and NGO's in the sector of the ICT's.

Yam Pukri which in local language moore means ***awakening of the African intelligence*** started in the years 1998 with his own capital stocks. With the time, it received assistances of multiple organizations and since then developed.

The singularity of this telecenters which is one of the pioneers in that way is to continue to work and to innovate, although the private market of the ICT'S invaded its field of principal activity (training and web access).

To survive, Yam Pukri started to propose other commercial services in the field of the ICT'S, which enabled him to balance its accounts.

If at the beginning of the era of the ICT'S in Burkina, the mission of the telecenters were to provide accesses to the Internet for the majority, the proliferation of the private accesses redrew the landscape of the telecenters to social vocation in the urban environment. Their survival is related to their capacity of creativity. The experiment of Yam Pukri shows that at the origin of the installation of telecenters, a debate must be committed in order to establish a prospective vision as regards autonomy.

The definition of the term of autonomy becomes also a problem of conceptualisation, because an autonomous NGO for us is that which manages to cover its operating expenses. The hedging of the total expenses will put the organization in the balance of private and the costs of the services will reflect the market demand.

We must thus cause incentives with the creativity and the innovation in the Community telecenters in order to help them to fulfil their mission of social service.

Burkina Faso is situated in the center of West Africa and spread over 274200 Km². The population was 13 million. It is a Sahelian country. Agriculture occupies 80% of the active population and makes up 30% of the gross domestic product of the country. According the UNDP, Burkina Faso ranks among the poorest nations in the world. Indeed, a survey led by the National Institute of Statistics and Demography showed that more than 40% of the population lives below poverty level.

In the domain of telecommunication, Burkina Faso made great progress especially with the arrival of the mobile telephones and the Internet since 1996.

Yam Pukri is an association which promotes new technologies, and the Internet in Burkina Faso. It is one of the pioneers in this field in Burkina Faso.

The birth of Yam Pukri comes from the report that the access to the use and training in data processing and the Internet was very limited. It also comes owing to the fact that new technologies can contribute to increase the effectiveness of the work of the individuals and the organizations and that it is necessary to promote the use of these tools. Indeed, in the absence of promotion, even the party of the population which is in a position to use would not see a great advantage there. By creating an associative structure, it was possible to help the potential population. It means that which has the needs to be equipped and also, that needy, which wants to use well the tools but which miss possibilities to reach it.

Created in 1998, this association very quickly took its rise with the support of partners like **Fondation du Devenir, Terre des Hommes, IICD** (International Institute for communication and Development, Haye) with the Local information and exchange knowledge sharing program (**Burkina ntic.org**) made it possible to sit a material and institutional basis with the organization.

The last innovations of Yam Pukri are the opening of its computer museum, the realization of a micro computer with a full out of local materials, its remote training program with African Virtual University, the realization of a Web site to vocation to diffuse videos on the Internet and the creation of a private firm in order to collect certain markets in the field of the ICT'S.

In this paper, we will forward the strategy of approach of Yam Pukri, its mink, its assets and its prospects in this very dynamic current for new technologies in term for autonomy.

- Yam Pukri strategy of approach

The strategy of approach can be described " as targeted approach " because we go towards the target public which is or appears most interested by this kind of tools. The objective here is to bring the tools closer to the user and to thus reduce the costs of displacements all while making it effective. That also makes it possible to create negotiable instruments of drive by implying the other public ones more and more which would feel excluded.

We are thus interested initially by the use of new technologies and the problems involved in this use.

We thus install centers of formation in the educational circles and also in the urban environment but near of the environment where the uses of the ICT'S are required.

Thus among the 5 centers of formations that Yam Pukri has, two are installed in colleges and colleges, three in public spaces.

It should be said that the needs as regards new technologies are felt in the capital than in the other localities because of the concentration for the activities.

Also let us announce that connectivity is very difficult inside the country, which makes difficult of the projects of this type.

It is for that that Yam Pukri undertakes specific formations in some provinces thanks to pilot operations.

To work effectively, Yam Pukri tries to forge its own comprehension of the phenomenon news technologies and the stakes which are dependent on there.

Stakes and vision of new technologies of Yam Pukri

Principal stakes

The stakes in favour of the N are significant and we should not let anybody undertake this task: it is with us to define what is adequate for our countries and our populations use options NTIC.

New technologies, in particular data processing and the Internet are regarded as a means to help and accelerate the development in the world and particularly in the countries in the process of development.

The multiplicity of the interventions, the innovations and the experiments in favour of new technologies in our countries challenges us to coordinate our efforts in order to be more effective. The ground of new technologies is so vast that one cannot speak about competition, but of complementarity and support for the various committed initiatives that and there Associative work is an effective means to touch the underprivileged people who do not have means to learn or use these tools.

Other concerns of Yam Pukri

Non implication of civil society can lead more and more to a marchandisation of the world by powerful groups which will be able to manage information on a world level and the level local. The majority of information which interests people of the South is not put on numerical format. Information which passes in numerical format is stored in distant computers in occident, which gives a right of user and access facilitated for the occident. A technical or malevolent problem can thus block the access to information of the countries of the South.

No hardware, for example the computers are designed in Africa. We are thus depending so much in hardware and software on the occident, from where a perpetual danger of change and significant financial expenditure.

An associative organization based on the merit and excellence

Yam Pukri is a specific association owing to the fact that all those which profit from its services are of office its members. Apart from that, there are active members who are the body of the organizers.

In each of the 5 centers of formation, one to 2 organizers the formations ensure.

To pass from the simple statute of member to that of active member belonging to the brains trust, the member must deserve his place while working in a field which interests it.

At the beginning of its creation, the majority of those which were appointed at stations of responsibility could not adhere to their commitments is for lack of motivation or for lack of qualification. It is thus significant that an associative structure does not give responsibilities to an interested but nonqualified third person, especially in a very demanding field. If in other associations which deal with the questions of health public (SIDA, vitamin deficiency) or of the problems of the environment, the financial backers are numerous, very few partners dare to invest in the NICT'S, with the result that only impassioned can work effectively in an association NICT'S.

Yam Pukri is made up of a light structure made up of a President and in his assistant of a secretariat and a principal coordinator charged to manage with the daily newspaper the businesses of association. This coordinator deals thus with the organizers which are in the centers of formation.

In order to be more operational, of the Committees were created, each of one occupying a specific aspect of new technologies.

At present five Commissions take shape distinctly in association, it acts of:

1. The Commission creation and animation of local Web sites
2. The data-processing Commission maintenance
3. The Commission forums of exchanges of the young people by the Internet
4. The Commission study and observation of the phenomenon news technologies in Burkina Faso and in the world.
5. The Commission assistance with the installation and the analysis of numerical data.

The Commission functions either permanently, or according to needs'. Each member of association can, by his creativity to create his Commission, to work and develop his activities. Greatest work for the organizers on the training level is to identify the recipients of training in data processing and to propose a type of formation adapted at the school level, the needs and the professional profile of the member.

Advantages of the *collective access to training and ICTs*

The advantages for this kind of approach are multiple. The population is poor. The needs felt by the population are different from that which one can imagine in Occident. The majority of the population does not need to use a computer daily or to open its box of electronic mail, the volume of the transactions being reduced. It is thus not often necessary individually to have a microcomputer or a personalized access Internet. If I receive 5 messages per month, to pay a subscription Internet would be simply a wasting of resource. It as should be recognized as the high cost of the equipment data processing is not with the range of the average purses, even easy in our countries. The collectivization of the needs and the tool is thus a source of economy and increase in effectiveness.

Indeed, a firm or an association cannot survive in an environment where each person has her own access mode, which makes collectivization nonprofitable.

The collective access thus allows:

- To return the use and training cost of the hardware cheaper. That thus allows those which would never have had the means of granting a computer or a connection Internet private to profit the multiple advantages from them.
- To make available and available the data-processing tool even in the moved back places.
- To make viable the structures of collective accesses.

Problems involved in the collective accesses

The problems involved in the collective accesses are of command organisational and institutional:

Who manages this access? A person or an association?

Which are the mechanisms installed to ensure the perenity of the center, in particular the maintenance of the data-processing equipment, the recycling of the personnel, the internal hedging of the costs of operation?

Several scenarios can be considered. We here will see two alternatives of mode of coordination of this activity: private or social organization (association, ONG...).

If it acts a private firm, one can think right now that the owner would be interested by the fast profit or financial profitability. On the other hand, management is facilitated and the owner is concerned daily maintenance of his firm. At every moment, this owner, if it saw this activity thinks of maintaining its structure perennial and of innovating, to create other advantages for faithful its customers if it is in a competitive environment.

The dilemma here is that it is sometimes difficult to reconcile the interest of the greatest number, in occurrence the populations with low incomes with the requirements of the private market. The dearness of the cost of the access to the private services which can rise from this mode of management thus will reduce considerably its objective first which is to give access of the greatest number this development tool.

In this case of an association, co-operative or another form of regrouping, management is more delicate, considering often individually, one does not have the same motivation as that of the group.

The structure will survive if it is able to be projected in the future and to make credible scenarios self-management self-financing. It must be able to renew the inventories of its hardware and to offer services to prices covering the costs of operation.

The fast dynamics of new technologies and the need for Yam Pukri to adapt to the new contexts

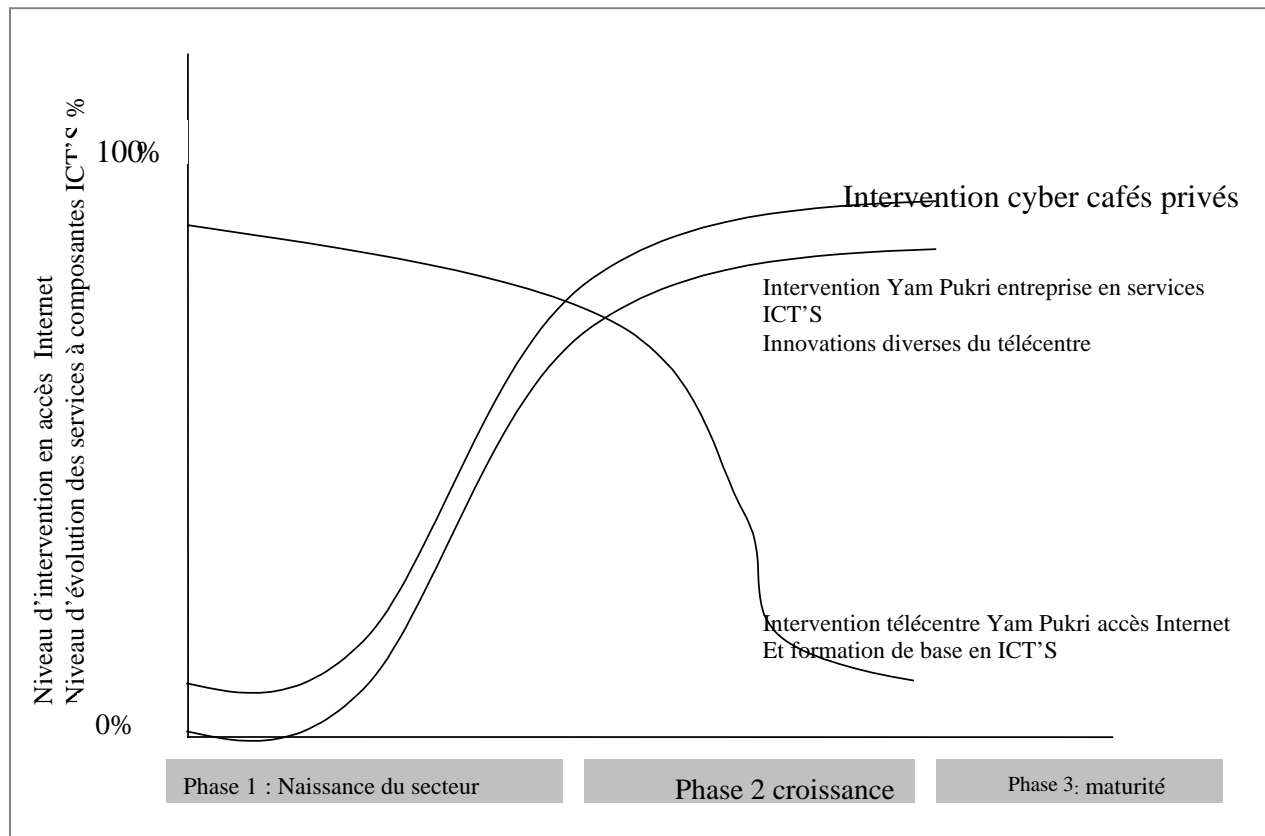
Yam Pukri formed more than 3000 people since her creation in data processing and with the Internet. It is requested to give its point of view with regard to new technologies to Burkina Faso. It takes part and is invited to the majority of the regional and international meetings on the subject (Bamako 2000, Bamako 2002, Global CN 2000...)

Yam Pukri lead studies on phenomenon NTIC to Burkina Faso and that allows it to readjust its shooting to be more incisive and with the need listening of its members.

It is also member of several networks working on new technologies.

If at the beginning of the creation of Yam Pukri in 1998, the public access to the Internet amounted end of the fingers, currently there are public accesses to the Internet especially in the

urban environments. The basic problem at present is the lack of infrastructure and bad connectivity. There were certainly efforts in this direction with the support of the UNDP by the installation of the regional nodes, the projects ADEN, projects IICD... Even the telephone is inaccessible in the rural areas; we do not speak about the Internet. As long as this problem is not solved, it would be difficult to develop new technologies.



The challenge of Yam Pukri: to combine the entrepreneurial with the social one

Yam Pukri because of the capitalization of its experiment is requested to offer paying services, which constitutes the essence of its working capital today. It even created a firm (Sulga Concept) in order to be able to postulate at markets of the State. For Yam Pukri, an association which does not innovate is dedicated to closing in time. Associations must thus learn how to offer paying services to develop and forget the theory of the begging.

In 2000, Yam Pukri had like daily return 100 \$ US for navigation Web. In 2006, it had only 5 or 10\$ per day. It is thus necessary to be creative to continue to function in this market of strong competition.

Another danger to this approach of durability is that the financial partners are diverted dynamic structures which took more risk and which wish to be helped and strengthened, if not, they will leave their mission of social service to be simple firms.

The main part of the receipts of a telecentre are consisted the expenses of connection is the receipts of formation. With the proliferation of the private accesses, the telecenters in the urban environment are obliged to revise their strategies, because this service is provided in majority by the private ones. Thus, a person does not come in general in a telecenter to connect to the internet, but comes because it is interested by another service, if not, it prefers to be connected in a place close to it.

The task of associations is not therefore reduced, but they must learn how to position and not to be focused on grounds occupied by the private one.

In the field of the ICTs, the telecenters and the private ones must be complementary. For example, information on the potentialities of the ICTs, the expertise as regards sharing of knowledge are favorite grounds of the telecenters.

Telecenters, between social role and financial sustainability

One often wonders if associations which propose services Internet must align their tariffs on those of private or offer services to social costs.

This question is complex because the alignment of the costs on those of the market can let believe that associations are not powerful and do not make the social one. With the competitive prices currently practised, one can wonder how the private one is left there; it is difficult to answer this question. The research of a minimal profitability however requires associations that they manage to cover their operating costs. However, as a practitioner this rate, they will not be competitive with the market with technologies used currently.

It is thus preferable, if such a situation arises to seek other solutions by diversifying the activities of the structure. It is indeed very difficult to compete with the sector deprived in certain fields.

Strategy of guideline of Yam Pukri in the field of the ICT's

The ONG play and must play a role of foreground in the promotion of ICTs. They must provide services that the private one cannot compensate fault of competences.

The focusing of the ONG to this task is also delicate because the possible financial backers always speak about autonomy and self-management.

The experiment of Yam Pukri in Burkina shows that it is impossible for Ong to be autonomous by making the social one, if not; it would pass in the camp of the private one. An association can be described as autonomous if it manages to cover its operating expenses, the basic investments and the initial working capital being ensured by other organizations or by a generators activity of incomes.

It is for that that Yam Puki centered its triennial program on the questions of creation of contents by associations and ONG, the teacher training of centers of formations and access Internet and also, the installation of a network of exchanges of information between associations.

Yam Pukri indeed noted that it misses services of avant-garde in the ICT'S in Burkina. Most of the tenants of access Internet do not have a good basis to approach the problems of the ICT'S that it is on the technical aspect (use of free software, for example).

Yam Pukri thus proposes formations for this public in order to make them more powerful.

Activities such as **the forum of exchange between the young people** with Ground of the Geneva Men make it possible to the young people of Burkina to swap with other young people of the whole world on topics such as the right of the children, the job of children...

The programme of **creation of local area network and exchanges of information** made it possible to develop a local expertise as regards ICT'S This expertise is requested either by the State, or by deprived or individuals in work with component ICT'S. The firm creates by association is thus able to position on this level to benefit from opportunities.

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