

Impact Insight:

Senegal's 2023 Internet Shutdowns on Women, Youth, and Marginalized Communities

The 2023 internet shutdowns disproportionately impacted women, youth, and marginalized communities, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities. These groups, often the most vulnerable during crises, were particularly affected by the disruption of essential digital services for education, economic activities, and communication.

The shutdowns amplified inequalities, disproportionately affecting rural and peri-urban populations, where reliance on mobile internet is more pronounced and access to Wi-Fi is nearly nonexistent. Many individuals were deprived of crucial access to educational tools

and professional resources, widening the gap between connected populations and peripheral communities.

A striking example of this impact can be seen in the experiences of students. While youth in urban areas with access to Wi-Fi were able to continue their studies, those who depended exclusively on mobile internet, often in peri-urban and rural areas, were left behind. This created a sense of injustice and frustration among interviewees, particularly those already facing socioeconomic disadvantages.

Key Findings

- **Women and digital disparities**
 - Women in rural areas, reliant on mobile internet for their studies and family responsibilities, were severely affected. Their access to digital tools and educational platforms was blocked, placing them at a disadvantage compared to their urban peers.
 - Women interviewed expressed concerns about disruptions to their professional and educational projects, as well as difficulties managing family activities during the shutdowns.
- **Impact on youth**
 - 79% of respondents reported that access to online educational resources significantly worsened during the shutdowns.
 - Female students at the Université Virtuelle du Sénégal (UVS) testified about delays in their courses, frustrations with unmet educational investments, and fears of falling behind their peers, further entrenching inequalities in the education system.
- **Marginalized communities**
 - Rural and peri-urban areas, with limited access to Wi-Fi, were among the hardest hit. These already vulnerable communities depend heavily on mobile internet for educational and financial needs.
 - Residents of these areas reported greater difficulties accessing essential services such as financial and educational platforms, further deepening pre-existing inequalities.

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- **Unequal access to circumvention tools**

- Tools like VPNs, although essential for circumventing shutdowns, remained out of reach for most marginalized communities due to their high cost and technical complexity.
- These limitations reinforced the digital exclusion of these groups.



I'm concerned about the digital divide that could widen, where the most vulnerable populations, often the hardest hit by these shutdowns, will have less access to economic and educational opportunities. This could exacerbate existing inequalities and hamper development efforts. These concerns lead me to hope that Senegal adopts a proactive approach to guaranteeing reliable and inclusive internet access, while ensuring the protection of civil rights and strengthening democratic institutions.

Testimony shared in the survey

To learn more, read the full reports:

- [The Impact of Senegal's 2023 Internet Shutdowns on Society, the Economy, and Trust in Democracy](#)
- [The Price of Disruption: Evaluating the Economic Impact of Senegal's 2023 Internet Shutdowns](#)