

ICT in Education in the Comoros

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Source: *World Fact Book*¹

Please note:

This short *Country Report*, a result of a larger *infoDev*-supported *Survey of ICT in Education in Africa*, provides a general overview of current activities and issues related to ICT use in education in the country. The data presented here should be regarded as illustrative rather than exhaustive. ICT use in education is at a particularly dynamic stage in Africa; new developments and announcements happening on a daily basis somewhere on the continent. Therefore, these reports should be seen as “snapshots” that were current at the time they were taken; it is expected that certain facts and figures presented may become dated very quickly.

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Overview

Comoros -- one of the poorest and smallest countries in the world, with a coup-prone, turbulent history over the past few decades -- Comoros boasts a national ICT policy as an expression of its government's commitment to promote improved ICT infrastructure, as well as access and usage across the education system. There are, however, very few initiatives underway that promote the use of ICTs in Comoran schools and education institutions.

Country Profile

Comoros is the third-smallest African nation by area, and one of the smallest in the world. With a population estimated at 798,000, it is also the sixth-smallest African nation by population, but has one of the highest population densities of the continent. The Comoros Islands are considered a microstate (a sovereign state that has a very small area and population).²

Since independence from France in 1975, the country has had a troubled history marked by a series of coups and separatist struggles. By 2002, three of the major islands were considered as part of the Union of the Comoros, although each has considerable autonomy and the fourth island remains under the jurisdiction of France.

Agriculture is the principal economic activity with crops grown both for domestic consumption and for export. The major food crops are cassava, coconut, bananas, rice, sweet potatoes, pulses, and corn. Vanilla, ylang-ylang, cloves, and copra have been the major export crops. Historically the country was the world's leading producer of ylang-ylang oil and the world's second-largest producer of vanilla. But with the decline in the price of these products, the value of these exports to the economy also dropped. There is a small tourist industry on the islands which had been recently promoted by South African interests.³

Comoros is one of the poorest countries in the world. Economic growth has declined since 2004, precipitated by declining investments and cash crop prices, low consumption, and rising inflation. The Comoran labour market comprises predominantly low-skilled labourers engaged in subsistence agriculture and high levels of unemployment.⁴

Table 1 provides a brief overview of the basic socio-economic indicators for the country.⁵

Table 1: Basic Economic Indicators: Comoros

Indicator	
Population (2005)	690,000
Languages	Official languages: Arabic and French. National language: Shikomoro.
2005 economic activity (% of GDP)	Agriculture: 35.1% Industry: 10.1%

	Services: 54.8%
Human Development Index (2004)	132 (out of 177 countries)
Per capita gross national income (US dollars)	\$400 (2000); \$560 (2004); \$640 (2005)

The Education System

The Ministry of National Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports oversees the educational system of Comoros. From the age of five, all Comoran children attend Quranic schools for two to three years. Because Quranic schools are free, parents are encouraged to send their children to attend. The Comoran primary and secondary school system is modelled on the French system. All children complete eight years of schooling between the ages of seven and 15. The system provides six years of primary education, followed by seven years of secondary schooling, followed by post-secondary education which includes teacher training, agricultural education training, health sciences, and business. Because the country does not have any universities, higher education is pursued abroad.

The education system has been affected by unrest and political instability in the form of teacher strikes and student protests which have had a negative effect on the quality of education and learner performance.⁶

Table 2 provides a snapshot of education indicators in Comoros.⁷

Table 2: Education Indicators

Enrolment in primary education (% gross)*	85 (2004)
Enrolment in secondary education (% gross)*	35 (2004)
Transition to secondary	67 (2003)
Enrolment in tertiary Education (% gross)*	2 (2004)
Gender Parity Index (GPI)**	0.88 in primary; 0.76 in secondary; 0.77 at university (2004)

*Percent of gross is the number enrolled as a percentage of the number in the eligible age group.

**GPI = gross enrolment ratio (GER) of females, divided by the GER of males and indicates the level of access by females to education compared to males. In Comoros, the GPI suggests that there is limited gender parity at all three levels of the education system.

It is evident from the figures in Table 2 that the drop-out rate is high and that few children attend secondary school. However, there has generally been an increase in primary enrolment since the late seventies, which is partly attributable to the adoption of

the Education For All programme which led to the suspension of school fees in the Moheli Island.⁸

Adult literacy levels are low, however, with 56.5% of adults being functionally literate in 2003 (males 63.6%; females 49.3%).⁹

Infrastructure

Table 3 provides an overview of the Comoros ICT infrastructure.¹⁰

Table 3: ICT Infrastructure Indicators

Indicator	
Fixed-line subscribers (2004)	15 per 1,000 persons
Mobile subscribers (2004)	9 per 1,000 persons
Dial-up subscribers (2004)	1 per 1,000 persons
Internet users (2004)	8 per 1,000 persons
Radio stations (2001)	AM 1; FM 4.

A law authorising the liberalisation of the telecom sector and the privatisation of the Société nationale des postes et télécommunications (SNPT) or its daughter companies was approved by Parliament in 1997. Economic reform in general and reform in the telecom sector has been slow due to the political crises of the last decade.¹¹

The SNPT, however, remains the sole provider of telecommunication and Internet services. SNPT has about 10 000 lines, mostly on the main island and in the capital Moroni, but also on two other islands, which are linked by analogue microwave along with Mayotte (the French protectorate). SNPT also operates the SITA network POP on behalf of the company.¹²

ICT Policies

Since 2003 the Comoran government has been involved in the development of an ICT policy¹³ and strategic plan with the support of the UN Economic Commission for Africa. The National ICT Policy adopted in 2004 commits the government to developing a multi-disciplinary policy that takes into account strategic axes and nine principles. The principles are:

- Using ICT as a tool for human development and to reduce poverty
- Promoting good governance through ICT
- Facilitating the process of reconciliation and reconstitution of national unity in encouraging social and cultural interaction in society
- Taking into account regional differences
- Taking into account the gender aspect
- Adopting the regional vision on ICT
- Intensifying economic activities

- Building capacities for firms
- Promoting a new policy for co-operation and partnership

The strategic axes include building human resources capacities, which highlights the goal of connecting schools and universities with ICTs and recognises that ICTs have the potential to promote and support collaboration among students and teachers and to reduce communication and administrative costs. Activities proposed to reach these goals include:

- Teacher training in ICTs and the use of computers in teaching
- Awareness and training of education sector personnel on pedagogical applications of ICTs
- Introducing ICTs in the education system
- Designing curricula and developing software

The policy also commits the government to promoting partnerships between the public and private sectors and schools in defining the pedagogical content and mechanisms of funding.

Current ICT Initiatives and Projects

There are a few initiatives under way in Comoros. These include the following:

- The **University of the Comoros** has been included in the recently established Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) programme promoted by the Commonwealth of Learning. The VUSSC is a network committed to the collaborative development of free content resources for education.¹⁴ The university had 2,600 students in 2005-06.
- The **Centre National de Documentation et de Recherche Scientifique** (CNDRS) is divided into seven divisions: Archives nationales, Bibliothèque nationale, Documentation nationale, Musée national, Recherche scientifique, Production et valorisation, and Administration. CNDRS has a micro-computers and informatics training programme.
- The **Division Documentation Nationale** is responsible for the management of documentation on the Comoros and for co-ordinating the development of a national information system, external relations to CNDRS, and the process of computerising the Centre's information.
- The collections of CNDRS and the **Centre de Documentation de la Direction Générale du Plan** are both computerised.
- The **Bibliothèque Nationale** produces a bibliographic database on Comoros called BABCOM, which is based on CDS-ISIS.¹⁵

Implementing ICT in Education: What Helps and What Hinders?

Table 4 provides a summary of the current stage of ICT development in Comoros in terms of enabling or constraining features in the education system.

Table 4: Factors Influencing ICT Adoption

Factors	Enabling Features	Constraining Features
<i>Policy framework and implementation</i>	Comoros has a national ICT policy which includes consideration for the provision of access to and use of ICTs in education.	
<i>Advocacy leadership</i>	The national ICT policy is being promoted by the president.	
<i>Gender equity</i>		There is no explicit mention of commitment to women's empowerment and gender equality with reference to ICT access and use, nor are there dedicated projects and programmes in this area.
<i>Infrastructure and access</i>		Comoros has a very poor and under-developed ICT infrastructure and very low levels of ICT access in education institutions.
<i>Collaborating mechanisms</i>	The national ICT policy refers to the need for collaboration and multi-stakeholder partnerships.	
<i>Human resource capacity</i>		Comoros has extremely limited human resource capacity exacerbated by very high levels of illiteracy.
<i>Fiscal resources</i>		Comoros is strongly dependent on external donor funding.
<i>Learning content</i>		Not much digital education content based on the local curriculum frameworks is available in Comoros education institutions.

Notes

1 The World Factbook 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cn.html>

2 Comoros. Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comoros>

3 Comoros Economy. <http://www.ksu.edu/sasw/comoros/economy.comoro>

- 4 Comoros. Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comoros>
- 5 “Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and Global Water Crisis.” Human Development Report. <http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/>
- 6 Comoros – Religion and Education. <http://countrystudies.us/comoros/13.htm>
- 7 EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007: http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49591&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
- 8 UNICEF Comoros. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/comoros_2674.html
- 9 The World Factbook 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cn.html>
- 10 *World Telecommunications Development Report 2006*. 2006. ITU. <http://devdata.worldbank.org/external/CPPProfile.asp?CCODE=COM&PTYPE=CP>
- 11 “Comoros Telecom Market Speeds Up Reform. Afrol News. <http://www.afrol.com/articles/13780>
- 12 Balancing Act News Update. http://www.balancingact-africa.com/country_profile.php?id=30
- 13 National ICT Policy. <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/nici/Documents/LETTRE%20%20DE%20%20POLITIQUE%20%20%20NTIC%20COMORES.pdf>
- 14 Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth. <http://www.wikieducator.org/VUSSC>
- 15 Balancing Act News http://www.balancingact-africa.com/country_profile.php?id=30

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