

Field survey report for the Global South eHealth Observatory

THE GLOBAL SOUTH



FONDATION PIERRE FABRE

EHEALTH OBSERVATORY

Meeting with the “eCentre Convivial” project

Togo - April 2020

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eCentre Convivial Awareness Campaign in schools, with teenagers.

CONTEXT

The entire eCentre Convivial project team, and in particular its Director, Rodrigue Akolly, was very responsive in getting in contact with StartupBRICS, and a meeting was set up in just a few days. It must be said that since the beginning of the international pandemic of Covid-19, the programme has been in a state of turmoil: an entire module of the application was developed in record time by the developers of the Centre to meet the pressing demands of the population, worried about the arrival of the virus in Togo. The project's doctors are on site 24 hours a day to answer users' questions, and a self-test has even been developed in partnership with the Ministry of Health!

The country has closed its borders since 20 March 2020 and its capital, Lomé, is cordoned off by police roadblocks: we will therefore meet the whole team, as well as the doctors and beneficiaries of the programme via a video conference.

Togo's health system is decentralised, and relies on a network of Health Establishments which successively includes University Hospital Centres (CHU), Regional Hospital Centres (CHR), private hospitals, Health Centres and then Local Health Units (USP). The most common health problems are malaria, child malnutrition, lung diseases and infectious diseases. However, with regard to young people and adolescents, the major difficulties lie in sexual and reproductive health (SRH), including STIs and HIV according to the 2017-2022 National Diagnosis and Treatment Protocol report. In this age group, there is also an early pregnancy rate of 17%.

SRH is indeed a cause for concern for the country's health officials, a concern that is all the more understandable when one considers that in Togo, under-25s make up more than 60% of the population, and nearly 45% of the population are aged between 15-19 years old. Although the HIV epidemic is declining with a prevalence of 2.1% in the general population, according to the 2017 Report on STIs from the National HIV/AIDS Control Plan, prevalence rates remain well above the global average, with a fertility rate among young people and adolescents of 84/1,000, compared to 47.1 on a global scale. This worrying situation is largely due to the poor access of information and quality health services available to this age group.

Maternal and child health raises the same alerts, since according to the EDST III 2014 report [Demographic and Health Survey in Togo], only 57.2% of pregnant women have attended the recommended four prenatal consultations before giving birth. Likewise, only 61% of pregnant women had births attended by qualified health personnel, of whom 35.2% had at least one post-natal follow-up appointment. Unfortunately, the risk extends to the health of the infant, since pregnant women with little follow-up care during their pregnancy are also likely to have poor immunisation follow-up care, with less than 55% of children aged 12-23 months being fully vaccinated before the age of 12 months. Thus, not only is a significant number of Togolese women excluded from any quality medical follow-up care, but this has significant repercussions on the health of the unborn baby.

Nevertheless, the Government seems to have identified the scope of the problem, and several initiatives have been developed to counter these trends, including the National Programme for the Elimination of Early Marriages and Pregnancies in Schools. This

programme is supported by international sponsors such as UNFPA [United Nations Population Fund], which develops programmes for youth and adolescents, and the Global Fund, whose grant is earmarked for SRH issues. In the area of maternal and newborn health, programmes are supported by UNDP [United Nations Development Programme], UNAIDS and the Regional Leadership Centre in Dakar. This collective effort is clearly reflected throughout the country, since treatment of the various sexually transmitted infections is free in Togo, and family planning and contraception programmes are being deployed across the countries in partnership with civil society organisations.

HISTORY

The NGO that manages the project today was born from the initiative of several young Togolese in 2004, who wanted to take action for the youth of their country and decided to create "AV-Jeunes", the Volunteer Association for the Promotion of Young People. Their health-oriented initiative is rapidly gaining momentum, and they are leading many school health awareness campaigns through social networks and media outreach, before being identified by UNICEF and UNFPA, who will call on them to set up Youth Centres in several regions of Togo. However, in 2017, the team decided to change its practices and to take a digital turn:

"In spite of our 13 years of experience, the observation was irrefutable: despite all our communication actions, the practices did not evolve! Pregnancies and STIs were still on the rise, and the attendance of pregnant women at consultations was not increasing... Moreover, it was concluded that accessibility was always a problem, with patients struggling to travel to the Health Centres."

Rodrigue Akolly, Director of the eCentre Convivial Programme

The association therefore decided to take advantage of the technological leap brought about by the Internet and the development of applications to improve the accessibility of its services and to reach out to young people in their country. In order to move away from temporary actions and to be in continuous contact with young people and pregnant women, AV-Jeunes approaches the Ministries of Youth, Technology and Education, before being directed towards a call for projects from the Ministry of Health: the government requests the development of an innovative solution to support maternal health. Rodrigue Akolly's teams then immediately get involved in the project and will be the winners of the call for tenders. This is how the eCentre Convivial project, inaugurated in January 2018, is developing.

THE TEAM, AND THE INSTITUTIONAL SITUATION OF THE PROJECT

AV-Jeunes is now the sole operator of the project, which it coordinates on behalf of the Ministry of Health and numerous partners who all sit on its Steering Committee: Prime Minister's Office, National Council for the Fight against AIDS and STIs, Ministry of Education (represented by its Reproductive Health Focal Points), UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNDP and the Dakar Regional Leadership Centre (RLC YALI Dakar).

All the programme modules were developed in partnership with the Ministry of Health, according to its protocols and the guidelines of partners such as UNFPA (notably through its Tech4Youth project). Monthly activity reports are drawn up by the eCentre Convivial teams for distribution on the platform of NGOs and civil associations in Togo, which are then forwarded to the Prime Minister's Office and the United Nations. Every six months, a team from the Global Fund also comes to conduct a quality control of the data collected by the project.



The eCentre Convivial project team at the launch of a communication campaign

To carry out the full range of project activities, the NGO AV-Jeunes relies on 8 full-time employees, including an Executive Director, 2 developers, a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer and an accountant. Twenty-two telephone advisers complete the staff team, all general practitioners or specialists assigned to the project.

OPERATION AND TARGETS

AV-Jeunes has therefore developed, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and eCentre Convivial sponsors, an intuitive application that simplifies the population's access to information and services on sexual and reproductive health. Firstly, it provides access to information modules, reminders and advice on health matters, but it also provides access to a live health audio service, carried out by medical staff, which refers users when necessary to the nearest partner Health Centres.

The application now exists in two versions, targeting young people and teenagers on the one hand (eCentre Convivial), and pregnant women and young mothers on the other (eConvivial CPN). Today, Rodrigue Akolly's teams proudly claim more than 17,000 users: a success that extends throughout the Togolese national territory and covers a network of 46 Partner Health Centres. In the first quarter of 2020 alone, the centre managed more than 9,000 requests, while 200,000 messages were exchanged between users and telephone advisers!



eCentre Convivial
 Application web & mobile

- CONSEILS PRATIQUES**
 Recevez les conseils pratiques des professionnels sur différentes thématiques liées à la santé sexuelle et de la reproduction.
- CONSULTATION IST**
 Bénéficiez de services adaptés en matière de la prise en charge des Infections Sexuellement Transmissibles (IST).
- PLANNING FAMILIAL**
 Recevez les informations nécessaires pour l'espacement des naissances et pour éviter les grossesses précoces ou non désirées.
- SUIVI DE GROSSESSE**
 Bénéficiez d'un suivi de votre grossesse et recevez chaque semaine des conseils de nos sages-femmes.
- SUIVI DU CYCLE MENSTRUEL**
 Recevez en temps réel les informations utiles sur votre cycle menstruel afin d'adopter une meilleure hygiène de vie.
- ASSISTANCE EN LIGNE**
 Discutez 24h/24 et 7j/7, avec des professionnels de la santé (Médecin, Gynécologue, Sage-femme et conseillers).
- AGENDA**
 Soyez informés de tous les événements en lien avec la santé sexuelle et de la reproduction.
- JEUX**
 Jouez à des jeux Puzzle et Quizz, pour tenter de gagner des prix.

Créez votre compte sur... www.e-centreconvivial.org ou ...téléchargez la version mobile sur 

Projet de
AV-JEUNES ASSOCIATION

Poster presenting the eCentre Convivial application

Health reminders and advice

It all starts by creating an account: once the application is downloaded, the user enters his or her information (age, gender, region of origin and occupation) as well as a username. This last point is crucial, since it guarantees the anonymity of the data recorded on the platform, as well as data exchanged with the advisers: an essential prerequisite for the pact of trust that is being created between doctors and young patients on the eCentre Convivial application. It is therefore the phone number that will be used as an identifier. The creation of an account unlocks access to all the modules, a total of 10: Menstrual cycle monitoring, Pregnancy monitoring, STI monitoring, Vaccination monitoring, Contraceptive monitoring, Practical advice, Online assistance, Online consultation, Web series and Quiz. A new module has even been developed with the emergence of Covid-19, which will be detailed at the end of the report.

"It is thanks to AV-Jeunes that I got to know eCentre Convivial. The application is very intuitive: just fill in your information and choose the module you are interested in. For me, it was menstrual and ovulation monitoring. "
Justine Totu, student in Lomé and beneficiary of the application

"I'm pregnant and I've been using eCentre Convivial for 4 months: it was at the hospital that the association explained to me how to use it. Even without internet connection, I receive messages to remind me of my prenatal visits. "
Ms. Angko, a pregnant woman monitored at the hospital of Bè (Lomé) and beneficiary of the application



eCentre Convivial Campaign for the enrolment of pregnant women in hospitals

The Centre's teams are working to make the application known to as many people as possible during their various communication campaigns, mainly through social networks to reach out to young people and adolescents, while the NGO's midwives are raising awareness among pregnant women directly in hospitals. Registration can also be done via WhatsApp or SMS, allowing access to information even in offline mode. Once users are enrolled in one of the different modules, mainly the module for monitoring pregnant women or menstrual cycles, automatic SMS sending is activated. And in order to reach more and more beneficiaries, eCentre Convivial has been developed in the three most widely spoken languages in Togo: Kabiye, Ewe and French. The application also allows you to receive your prescriptions and test results online.

"Once you have registered on the application, reminders are sent to you without having to open the application: the dates of your next period, of your ovulation cycle. It doesn't cost anything and there are no fees! What's also handy is that even if you don't have time to use eCentre Convivial, you'll receive alerts to give you health advice before, during and after your period."

Justine Totu, student in Lomé and beneficiary of the application

The Digital Centre is thus supporting more than 2,500 young girls in 2020 for the monitoring of their menstrual cycle, and has a total of 550 beneficiaries for the monitoring of pregnant women, which only began in December 2019!

Listening and consultation

Beyond an informative aspect, eCentre Convivial provides its beneficiaries with a listening and consultation function: thanks to the setting up of a technical platform operating 7 days a week and 24 hours a day, users have direct and privileged access to a health professional. In a country where in 2013 there was less than one doctor per 14,000 inhabitants (Inseed-Togo), this is a real revolution! By clicking on the online assistance module, users are put in touch with a telephone adviser: general practitioners or specialists, on 3 rotating shifts of 8 hours (6am-2pm, 2pm-10pm and 10pm-6am) who provide a continuous listening service. Since its creation in 2018, eCentre Convivial has had more than 12,000 calls from telephone advisers.

"We receive messages about reproductive health, concerning all generations, on issues as varied as infertility, the menstrual cycle, premature ejaculation."

We help patients and refer them to AV-Jeunes' partner health centres."

Ms. Keglo, Midwife and eCentre Convivial call centre adviser

Of the 22 eCentre Convivial telephone advisers, there are gynaecologists, midwives, clinical psychologists, social counsellors and facilitators, whose role is to answer the questions of the beneficiaries and, if necessary, refer them for a physical consultation at the nearest partner health centre. There are many purposes: an STI consultation, an ultrasound scan, an analysis of vaginal discharge, etc. The patient then receives information about the health centre that he/she has been referred to and the medical staff who will attend to them. In order to facilitate the patient's care, the medical staff are also simultaneously informed of the patient's forthcoming arrival.

"Our job, above all, is information. Targeted information on the real needs of the patient."

Doctor d'Almeida, General Practitioner and supervisor at eCentre Convivial

The conversations between users and telephone advisers, always with a view of staying close to young people and teenagers, are carried out on a dedicated WhatsApp module integrated into the application. More than 90% of recorded exchanges are written, compared to only 10% of voice calls and this is proof of the importance of direct messaging. Telephone advisers may receive between 3 and 25 requests per day, with exchanges lasting on average between 5 and 15 minutes. For any call, the adviser begins by welcoming the patient. It's about making them feel comfortable and reassured. Of course, they sometimes call in situations of distress and then *"You have to take your time, to take the pressure off and put the person at ease,"* says Ms. Keglo, the midwife.

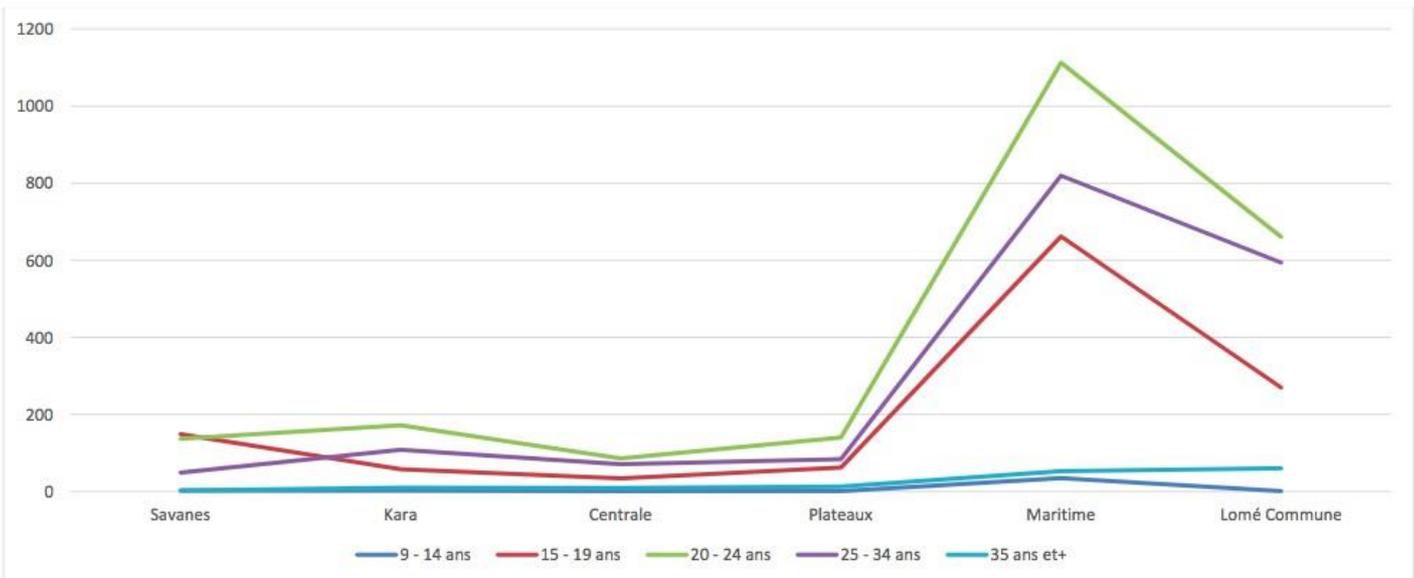
"Users tell us their problems: how to work out where you are through the menstrual cycle, how to identify the date of ovulation. They also ask us questions about what to do if there is a delay in menstruation and if that is normal. When necessary we can offer them a pregnancy test."

Doctor Fabrice Lawson, General Practitioner and telephone adviser at e-Centre Convivial

TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The eCentre Convivial and eConvivial CPN applications were developed in-house on an Android operating engine. Their development on iOS (iPhone) is underway. They have a consumer and web version, and a telephone and SMS contact module, which allows the system to operate "offline", i.e. off the internet network if necessary. The automated delivery of message packets is thus scheduled on a daily basis. The project outsourced the WhatsApp module of the application from the international company Infobib, through an automated Chatbot in which the WhatsApp API is made available for direct and fluent conversations with users.

Legally, the NGO is subject to the Law on the Protection of Personal Data, passed by the Togolese legislature in October 2019. All data collected is encrypted and stored on dedicated VPS servers on which all services are deployed, with a support server in case of failure or interruption of the first one. All project partners are subject to a use and confidentiality policy, and have administrator accounts with code access. The data is made available to them as it is stored, i.e. in an anonymous and encrypted manner: it is possible to see the age, region of origin and gender of the person, but under no circumstances will their first or last name be shown.



Figures for the downloading of the User-Friendly eCentre Application (the Maritime region is the most populated in Togo)

IMPACT AND ADDED VALUE

⇒ **The 1st added value of the project lies in the contribution to the improvement of SRH, and to the improvement of prenatal and vaccination monitoring for pregnant women.**

The module developed in partnership with the Ministry of Health on the monitoring of pregnant women was a direct order from the government, which wanted to contribute to the awareness-raising work carried out by midwives in hospitals. In fact, about 40% of pregnant women in Togo do not use the health facilities provided during pregnancy, and less than a third of pregnant women who consult the doctor for pregnancy monitoring care comply with the 4 minimum appointments recommended by the WHO. The reviews collected from the beneficiaries seem to highlight the usefulness of the module:

"For me, eConvivial is important because with all my daily problems, I often forget to attend my prenatal consultations.

Now, thanks to the messages in the application, I receive reminders for my prenatal consultations. I also get advice on my diet, and I recently learned that even after giving birth, I could benefit from the application follow-up care to remind me of my newborn's vaccination dates. "

Ms. Angko, a pregnant woman monitored at the hospital of Bè (Lomé) and beneficiary of the application

Tranche d'âge		Téléchargement de l'application	Assistance en ligne	Causerie éducative	Viol enregistré	Publication d'article	Diffusion de Vidéo	Total
10-14 ans	M	9	4	1 288	0	0	0	1 301
	F	39	4	1 585	0	0	0	1 628
	T	48	8	2 873	0	0	0	2 929
15-19 ans	M	424	784	1 460	0	7 429	0	10 097
	F	811	444	1 666	0	3 302	1 132	7 355
	T	1 235	1 228	3 126	0	10 731	1 132	17 452
20-24 ans	M	1 167	2 226	275	0	1 026 072	227 113	1 256 853
	F	1 142	868	190	5	515 007	77 339	594 546
	T	2 309	3 094	465	5	1 541 079	304 452	1 851 399
25-34 ans	M	1 065	1 473	30	0	54 486	105 752	162 806
	F	661	569	39	1	25 946	33 253	60 468
	T	1 726	2 042	69	1	80 432	139 005	223 274
35 et +	M	240	130	3	0	0	4 311	4 684
	F	64	46	5	0	0	2 261	2 376
	T	304	176	8	0	0	6 572	7 060
Totaux	M	2 905	4 617	3 056	0	1 087 987	337 176	1 435 741
	F	2 717	1 931	3 485	5	544 255	113 985	666 379
	T	5 622	6 548	6 541	6	1 632 242	451 161	2 102 120

e-Centre Convivial's activities in 2019

An effectiveness that also seems to be favoured on the reproductive health related modules:

"What I like about eCentre Convivial is that even if I forget my period or ovulation dates, I get reminders. Health tips are also very useful, explaining how to protect myself from getting pregnant if I'm not ready, and how to wash my underwear. "

Justine Totu, student in Lomé and beneficiary of the application

The application simplifies contact between the medical professionals and young people, and helps to build confidence and strengthen health practices:

"Contributions from eCentre Convivial are key. This is the first time that a free downloadable application has answered all the questions a young person might have about SRH. It is a new tool used to respond to their concerns and difficulties. "

Doctor d'Almeida, Doctor and supervisor at eCentre Convivial

⇒ **The second added value of the programme is the creation of direct and privileged access to a doctor for all its users.**

Today, all eCentre Convivial users benefit from their medical advisor in all areas of healthcare. A luxury for many Togolese, according to the Project Manager and the statistics in force.

"Not everyone has the opportunity to consult a doctor so easily: finding a specialist in Lomé is quite difficult. With eCentre Convivial, everyone has the right to access a doctor. This gives us the opportunity to reach a lot of people and our impact is enormous."

Doctor Fabrice Lawson, General Practitioner and telephone adviser at eCentre Convivial

"For me, our first contribution is the availability of counsellors: we are there 24 hours a day to respond to young people's problems, and are present at all times."

Doctor d'Almeida, Doctor and supervisor at eCentre Convivial

"One of the most important advantages of the application is that you don't have to wait in line at the clinic: you call the doctor you've been registered with and you have your appointment in advance, which is a great time saver."

Justine Totu, student in Lomé and beneficiary of the application

⇒ **Finally, an important added value of eCentre Convivial is the use of collected data.**

According to the Centre's teams, there was no data on SRH for young people in Togo until 5 years ago. Today, they are collected and summarised by the programme for the benefit of the government.

"All our data is made available to the government on a monthly basis. They are therefore the primary beneficiaries of data monitoring. This contribution of digital technology is something that helps to give the country a good image"

Rodrigue, Director of the eCentre Convivial project

"Today, with the help of the Global Fund, it is the eCentre Convivial activity report that is used to record youth-related data. We are the only organisation to provide this data, which is used to form the national indicator in terms of SRH"

Rodrigue, Director of the eCentre Convivial project

ECONOMIC MODEL AND FUNDS RECEIVED

The team would like to remind us that all the services are free for the beneficiaries: the partners finance them. The State, through the Global Fund grant, alongside UNFPA, finances the bulk of programmes for young people, while the majority of services for pregnant women are supported by UNDP, UN-AIDS and the Regional Leadership Centre in Dakar.

Over the period 2018-2020, the cost of the programme is estimated at €150,000. These costs are divided into salaries, telecommunications (SMS, network, etc.) and for the development of the application.

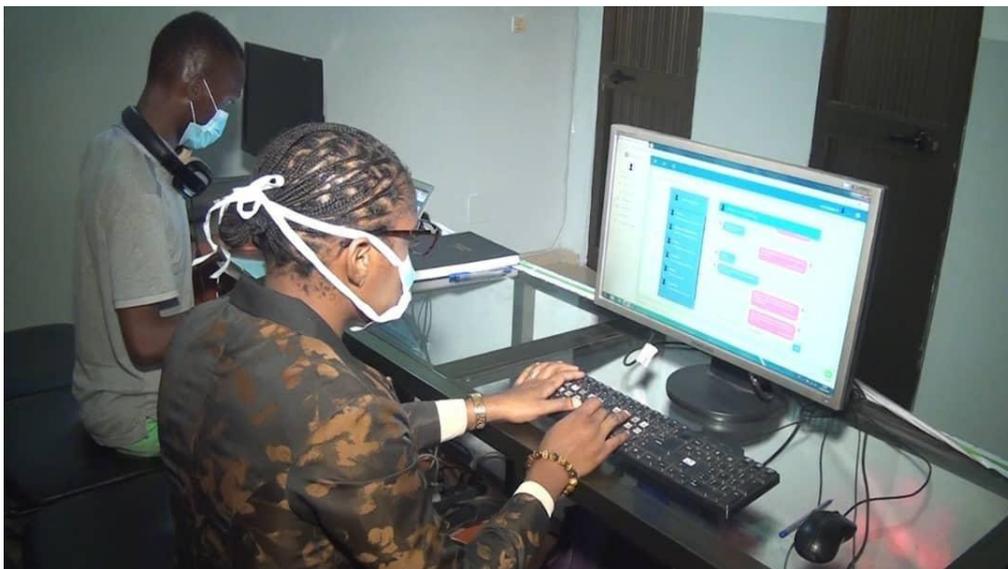
An important development to be taken into account in the years to come is the entrepreneurial ambition of the NGO, and its increasing willingness to develop

profitable activities. It was thus set up as a start-up, whose articles of association were filed on 11 March 2019. It intends to become a service provider for all partners and is considering a range of additional products. The creation of health packages dedicated to young people and at affordable costs, for example, between 5,000 and 15,000 FCFA [African Financial Community Franc] annually (between €8 and €22) so that they can benefit from health consultations throughout the year. Rates that could be appealing given that an ultrasound costs around 6,500 FCFA (10€) in the country. Similarly, the team is considering a range of low-cost contraceptive and menstrual products, which would be available in dispensers placed in universities or health centres.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED AND ROADMAP ENVISAGED

The main difficulties encountered by the NGO lie in budgetary constraints, with administrative staff having been without salaries for three months because of the poor calibration of the budget with the State. This problem has now been resolved, but the teams would like to have more resources in terms of equipment (tablets, telephones, IT equipment), logistics (travel by teams in the country at the request of the government), IT (platform capacity and connection difficulties) and electricity because of power cut problems. In particular, budgets should be set aside in the future for more substantial communication campaigns.

Regarding the eCentre Convivial's roadmap, in addition to its transformation into a start-up and the development of a line of health-related products, its teams plan to deploy regional focal points to further extend their coverage area and to allow many more young people to use the application. The NGO is also developing a phone consultation module for pregnant women, in cases where they would not be able to travel such as now with the Covid 19 pandemic.



The eCentre Convivial telephone advisers in consultation on the module dedicated to Covid19

COVID19 FOCUS

Situation report: Togo had 65 cases on 8 April 2020, 23 of which were cured and 3 of which ended in death. The Lomé region has been on lock down since 20 March and there is no more inter-prefecture travel. Schools and universities are closed, with a curfew from 8pm to 6am. Wearing a mask is recommended.

eCentre Convivial actions: in addition to making all their staff work from home to respect barrier gestures, eCentre Convivial wanted to take part in the fight against the virus, in coordination with the Ministry of Health and by configuring its mobile application to deploy a **phone consultation module dedicated to Covid 19**. The programme's physicians are available 24/7 to respond to the concerns of the population. The programme also broadcasts information via **web videos available in several local languages and quizzes, on barrier gestures** and measures to be taken to counter fake news. Finally, a **self-test feature is available**, to be completed on the application, which allows users to test their degree of exposure to the virus and to benefit from the guidelines for monitoring and management according to the system set up by the government. In case of risk, they are directed to 111. To complement its work, **the NGO has developed a map**, available on its website, which shows the daily evolution of cases in the country.