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Physics in Africa: The Case of Senegal

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For many years, the research activity in Senegal has been managed through the division of the Ministry of Education. In 2004 the current government established a full-fledged Ministry of Research. This has led to a renewed focus on the organization of the funding of research in Senegal. One important issue to underline is the lack of a budget line devoted to research in most of the local institutions, distinct from support for academic purposes. As a result, the research activity is funded through direct support from the government or thanks to international programs. The main tool for the government to support key research directions is the FIRST program, with a yearly budget of \$700,000 US. For the last call for projects, up to 12 projects have been funded, which translates to about \$58,000 US per project. The other option for research funding lies in different international programs specifically aimed at institutions within the least developed countries. The dominant ones are provided by the French-speaking community, the French-supported AIRE, the European Union framework and ICTP Abdus Salam Centre. In this general context of limited resources, physics is the least supported discipline both in terms of researchers and active laboratories. As a result, particular efforts have to be made to increase the impact of physics and the role of physicists so as to enable them to claim their proper role as the major player in making science and technology the driving forces in the development process of Africa.