

■ SENEGAL

A social and ecological time bomb



Senegal has been hit hard by the world economic crisis and it is faced with serious difficulties including a lack of transparency in State institutions and a lack of long term planning. This has made the country more vulnerable to natural disasters, but the Government has no effective plans to cope with these or to protect the population. Another serious challenge is deforestation, which is mainly due to the demand for fuel, and it is an ecological time bomb. Social unrest is on the increase and in the last year various sectors of society have taken to the streets in demonstrations calling for adequate governance.

Cultural Association for Educational and Social Self-Promotion (ACAPES); National Associations for the Disabled of Senegal (ANHMS); Democratic Union of Teachers (UDEN); Youth and Environment Action (AJE); Pan-African Youth Organizations (OJP), a member of the African Youth Coalition against Hunger; Syndicate of Professors of Senegal (SYPROS); Association for the Economic, Social and Environmental Development of the North (ADESEN); Enda TM.

In 2003 the Government began implementing its Strategy Document for the Fight against Poverty (DSRP), which is the reference framework for an economic and social policy aimed at national growth, reducing poverty and achieving the country's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

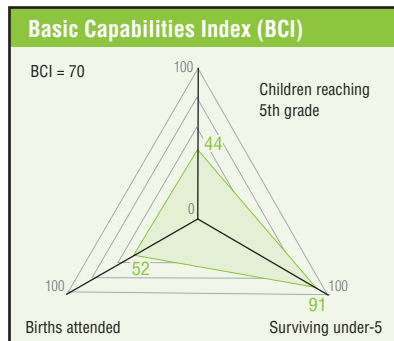
The world crisis hit Senegal very hard and the negative impacts reached a peak in 2010 when the economy and public revenues were seriously hurt by problems with energy, food and finances, and this laid bare the country's basic vulnerability. GDP growth in 2011 has been estimated at 4.2%,¹ but to overcome the economic crisis and reach the poverty eradication targets that have been set, it is vitally important to maintain a 10% growth rate, and the means that are used to achieve this should be in line with the principles of sustainable development.

The economic situation has certainly worsened. For example, there have been power cuts because of a lack of funds to maintain and run the power stations, and this has hampered economic growth so much so that in 2010 the rate was an estimated -1.4%.² One effect of this is that social inequity and vulnerability have become more serious.

Confusion in governance

The MDGs are a new reference framework that can be used to measure countries' development and to set parameters for evaluating progress towards sustainable development.

Judged from the MDG perspective, Senegal's development policies and strategies are not effective enough, particularly as regards maintaining essential social services and promoting gender equity. This constitutes a challenge, and the Government and all the actors involved will have to redouble their efforts

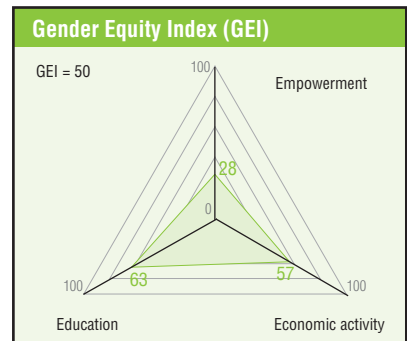


and gear their action to concrete objectives that are shared and focalised.

When we analyse the Human Development Index (HDI), which like the Basic Capabilities Index (BCI)³ gives ratings for gender inequality and for poverty, it emerges that Senegal has not laid solid foundations for sustainable development. In fact, in 2010 it ranked only 144th out of 169 countries.⁴ The way towards establishing a sustainable development model is plagued with difficulties and up to now the Government has not been able to tackle them effectively.

Official data show that since 2006 progress has been made towards reducing monetary poverty, but there is another indicator we should consider, non-monetary poverty, which gauges access to basic social services, adequate food, unpolluted water, decent housing and the overall conditions for a healthy life, and by these criteria the country is moving far too slowly to reach its MDGs by 2015.

The programmes to improve in these areas suffer from problems of governance. There are many institutions and agencies involved and different ministries that have overlapping responsibilities, and this makes for a very confused institutional governance framework. The way the public sector is structured is not geared to making effective development possible. The State today does not have good governance, it is not transparent and it does not have a culture of combating corruption, but these are essential if the country is to achieve decisive results and make



genuine progress.

Large sectors of the population are still living in poverty not only in rural areas but also in the cities, and households headed by women are particularly vulnerable. In recent years public spending on social protection and security has been around 1.16% of GDP, but this is even below the average for Africa, which is 1.44% (Ministry of the Family, of Women's Groups and Child Protection).

It is clear that a new approach is needed because the programmes to tackle these problems are not coordinated, some interventions are repeated and much of what is done is ineffective, all of which is reflected in poor results.

A Social Orientation Law promoting and protecting the rights of the disabled was passed in 2010, but up to now it has not been implemented and the institutional framework needed to provide care for people with different capacities and integrate them into social and economic life is not yet in place.

Social unrest

There have been large scale movements in the country calling for better conditions of life, work and security, and there have also been street demonstrations protesting against the high cost of living, power cuts, and the Government's failure to take action to help flood victims. This wave of unrest has irreversibly altered the social climate. There has been tension in the air for a year with rallies and marches, and a series of strikes in the education system, health services and even in the legal system.

The protests originated on the outskirts of Dakar and were backed by religious leaders (imams and priests) and they have since spread to all parts of the country, but the Government has tried to ignore

1 Data from the Ministry of the Economy and Finance – Board of Economic Forecasting and Studies.

2 Data from the Board of Economic Forecasting and Studies.

3 For a detailed description of the BCI see the report on its 2011 edition that is included in this volume.

4 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *The True Wealth of Nations*.

them. Initially this was a wide-based expression of discontent with the high cost of living, the power cuts and a range of other issues including the erosion of democratic values and the general deterioration of the people's conditions of life.

The movement subsequently diversified into different groups and there were anti-Government marches headed by imams and priests in 2009, protests by the youth movement "Y'en a marre" (We are fed up) led by hip hop musicians, and action by workers associations and other social groups that held mass meetings and staged hunger strikes outside the railings of the Presidential palace.

The environmental challenge

Senegal has structural problems that go hand in hand with the unsustainable development of the cities. Sewage services are still inadequate even though a lot of money has been spent on public cleanliness (which has led to a common joke "there is gold in this waste"). But there are other problems besides public hygiene such as deforestation, and erosion on the coast that is threatening whole communities. The problem of flooding has got worse and it is aggravated by a lack of precautionary planning and the fact that assistance initiatives are weak or non-existent. All parts of the country are under threat, a total of 521,968⁵ people have been affected in different ways by floods and lives have been lost in various places like Kolda in the south and Kaffrine in the east. Just in the northern region of Saint Louis some 5,661 families were driven from their homes and 4,354 latrines were destroyed, which caused a serious health hazard for the local population. Agricultural production was also hit as thousands of hectares of farmland that had already been sown were inundated.

This distressing situation is further complicated by the fact that there is a chronic lack of infrastructure in rural areas, which is why civil society organizations are pressing for investment in highways in country areas, stimulus packages to bolster the rural economy in peripheral regions and measures to accelerate Senegal's connections with neighbouring countries.

A discouraging panorama

There has been a certain amount of progress towards goals like restoring natural resources and land, helping biodiversity to recover in some areas, managing transboundary resources in a better way and the fight against pollution, so the country seems to be on the right track at least as regards reversing

INTENSE DEFORESTATION: AN ECOLOGICAL TIME BOMB

The forests in the south of the country are disappearing very fast and this is going on completely unchecked. In a report by the Commission of the Kandion Mangana Rural Council entitled "The environmental time bomb", the destruction of vegetation in the area is described as "actual extermination". This attack on the flora throughout the northern strip of the Casamance region has been going on for decades, it is particularly severe in the department (province) of Bignona, and it has intensified since 2005. The main reason for this devastation is the disruption caused by an ongoing conflict with the Casamance Democratic Forces Movement (MFDC), a guerrilla group that for more than thirty years has been demanding independence for this part of southern Senegal.

The deforestation process in this area involves vegetation being burned off indiscriminately, and one of the consequences of this is increased emissions of greenhouse gases, which cause global warming and climate change.

There are other factors involved in the degradation of these forests: land is being cleared so it can be planted with crops, vegetal coal is being extracted to meet the population's fuel requirements and wood is being taken for the construction industry, which is a direct threat to noble species that are mostly slow-growth ligneous hardwoods.

To put a brake on this ongoing deforestation a whole series of measures will have to be taken. The Government will have to restore forests that have been degraded, evaluate forestation programmes and implement the appropriate strategies, research and adopt sustainable resource management practices, protect existing forests (mainly by stopping people from burning off vegetation), promote the use of alternative sources of energy, protect the soils, and impose stricter controls on forest exploitation as part of a policy to regenerate and protect certain species of flora.

the degradation of the environment. Another good point is that it has a national strategy for adapting to climate change.

However, one area where there are serious problems is health. For example, investment in this sector is distributed in a most unequal way with a far greater proportion of the funds available going to the cities than to rural areas, particularly when it comes to setting up and maintaining health centres and maternity units. Far more finance goes to regional and national hospitals and specialized health organizations than to basic services that cater to the poorer sectors of the population. The Government's official line is that its main priority is to provide basic health care services, but this is not borne out by the facts.

Another problem is that there are not enough trained health care workers, particularly in country areas. This means some sectors find it far more difficult to access health care, and it is no surprise that the rural population is most disadvantaged in this respect. More than half of all trained health personnel are concentrated in just two regions, Dakar and Thiès, which have 52% of Senegal's doctors, 69% of the midwives and 31% of the nurses.

The fight against HIV/AIDS is going well among the people as a whole but there are certain regions and population groups (sexual workers, long distance truck drivers) that still have rates above 7%.

The proportion of births attended by trained health care personnel is low, and even though a great effort has been made to improve the situation, in 2009 coverage was only 66.9%. It is no surprise that maternal and infant mortality rates are still relatively high in the context of the goals that have been set for 2015.

In contrast to health, education is one of the sectors that has benefited from a rather generous allocation in the budget. But in spite of this, academic results are still poor compared to the average for Africa. This is mainly due to low school enrolment rates. At the pre-school level, for example, coverage is only 3 to 4% in some parts of the country and the national average is only 9.8%. There are other problems too: the drop-out rate in secondary education is high, there are too few science teachers, and technical education and vocational training are very underdeveloped. ■

5 Data from the Senegalese Red Cross.