

Farming: the sole answer



As the most food-import dependent country in West Africa, Senegal faces several challenges as a consequence of the multiple global crises which affect the economy, finance, environment, energy and, of course, food. All of these challenges result in the decline of the quality of life of Senegal's citizens – particularly amongst the more vulnerable sectors – because of their repercussions on the country's scant production, diminished imports and the high price of basic products. The Government's plans do not provide an adequate response to the country's needs. Civil society proposes returning to traditional agriculture, duly encouraged and supported by the State.

Social Watch Senegal¹

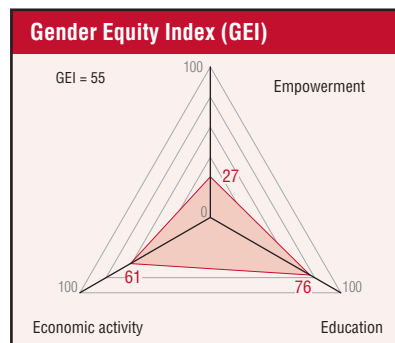
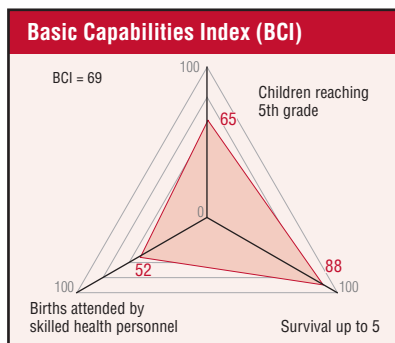
In Senegal, the worldwide food crisis caused by an increase in demand – particularly in the case of cereals – within a context of low yields and higher production costs due to the increase of oil prices, has given rise to riots throughout the country. The high price of oil and the increasing demand for energy have conspired against subsistence agriculture, as regards cultivated areas, due to the production of sugar cane and maize for biofuel (diesel and ethanol). The situation has become even more serious due to the problems caused by climate change and the financial crisis. Assistance for development diminished and exports were restricted in some countries – such as India – which particularly affected the more helpless populations of underdeveloped countries such as Senegal.

Some of the consequences of the crisis – which in developed countries impact on purchasing power rather than on the availability of food – are in Senegal malnutrition and the mass exodus of the population towards urban centres. In addition, poverty and unemployment have a negative impact on the likelihood of fulfilling the MDGs.

The level of access to basic social services for the population has remained extremely low in the country, with over 53.9% of the population subsisting below the poverty threshold. The more disadvantaged sectors in rural areas and the suburbs of large cities, together with children, women and the elderly, are the most affected. The Government's measures have not been effective since they have barely enabled access to healthy food in sufficient quantity to the population that is very close or below the poverty threshold. Measures taken should focus on the most disadvantaged, whose needs are greater, as in Senegal the State's budget favours the rich, the salary earners and city dwellers, and includes, in particular, subventions for electricity, gas, water and fuel. There are families in the cities' suburbs and in the country who barely have access to food.

Some of the factors that have influenced the most on the deterioration of the situation are:

- A rain-dependent agricultural sector which must confront soil degradation, low production,



the absence of agricultural development policies and the establishment of unpopular programmes which lack coherence, such as Back to Agriculture or the Great Agricultural Offensive for Food and Abundance (GOANA, in French), the lack of access to supplies, agricultural materials and credit, and weak investment in the sector (for example, the failure to honour the Maputo commitment, according to which the State should devote 10% of the budget to agriculture).

- The country's food dependence (Senegal is, per capita, the most food-import dependent country in West Africa). Local rice production barely covers between 20% and 30% of the country's needs; wheat is 100% imported. The production of cereals covers less than 50% of the demand.
- The environmental crisis resulting from global warming has reduced fishing in Senegalese waters. Fishing is an important source of resources for the primary sector and one of the main sources of protein for the population. According to the National Agency for Statistics and Demography, shortages amongst some species have resulted in an increase of 13.8% in the price of fish and other fresh marine products.
- As regards energy, the country's total dependence on oil imports and SENELEC's production makes it still incapable of guaranteeing an effective and financially accessible electrical service for consumers. Thus, despite its potential for generating renewable energy – Senegal is a very sunny country – energy sometimes represents 50% of the total cost of production.

- Populations and enterprises face difficulties in obtaining access to electricity, the price of which has gone up several times. Consumers strongly criticize the billing system and there are continuous energy cuts which cause inconvenience to households and slow down craft and industrial production. All of this has led to a wave of uprisings led by imams, priests and later on consumer associations and workers' unions.
- Due to the crisis which the African Refiners Association has been undergoing for some time, butane gas suffers chronic shortages on the market and is sold at prices which are inaccessible to consumers who, in addition, must queue for 24 or 48 hours at the points of sale.

Measures taken by the Government:

- The objective of the GOANA programme is to achieve food self-sufficiency through the production of 2 million tonnes of maize, 3 million tonnes of cassava, 500,000 tonnes of rice, 2 million tonnes of other cereals such as millet, sorghum and fonio millet. However, this solitary undertaking of the Government's, which established no connections with leading figures of the various agricultural sectors, or did so to a very limited extent, delays in establishing factors of production (such as seeds, fertilizers and agricultural materials), the intervention of administrative staff and traders in land and supply issues, have not made it possible to achieve the objectives despite adequate amounts of rain.
- The organization of a campaign for the distribution of provisions and cattle feed, for a total of

¹ This working group had the support of the Pan-African Youth Organization (PAYO), a member of the African Youth Coalition Against Hunger (AYCAH).

CFA 10 billion (USD 22 million) in rural populations affected by the crisis.

- The State's removal of customs duties and import taxes on some products such as subsidized rice and butane gas, although the expected results have been diminished by the drain of large quantities of these subsidized products sold in bordering countries by unscrupulous traders.
- The reduction of taxes on the salaries of workers for a total of CFA 6 billion (USD 13.2 million) and the subsidy of food products for a total of CFA 7 billion (USD 15.4 million).

Nonetheless, these measures are inadequate due to the fact that they are merely interim solutions, as well as being inequitable and ineffective, since they have not reached the more vulnerable sectors of the population. In their place, it is necessary to implement social investment in infrastructure in order to improve the population's access to basic social services (food, water, energy, education, health and habitat) and reduce inequality between men and women and different ethnic groups.

The impact on health

Although primary health care, the care of pregnancy-related risks and health care for the elderly show some progress, the social and financial crisis has hit the health sector and generated, amongst other things, personnel strikes, hospital debt, the closure of some of the maternity services – particularly in Dakar – the lack of qualified personnel, closed health posts or posts run by non-medical staff. There have been new outbreaks of diarrhoeal diseases and malaria. The illegal distribution of medicine has emerged (10% of the drugs circulated in the country are falsified) due to the absence of legislation adapted to the current situation and the absence of dissuasive measures.

Sanitation is very deficient throughout the country. Frequent floods often lead to the displacement and rehousing of people in unsuitable locations (such as schools and other public buildings) which upsets social and cultural networks and further deteriorates the sanitation situation.

An alarming lack of water-purifying stations and the strain on the Camberene station in Dakar is a cause of the contamination of all of the beaches and bays of the city, which are used to dump domestic and industrial sewage. In addition, the public garbage collection service is inadequate.

Gender and the crisis

Senegal continues to follow a very patriarchal model which has displayed scant progress regarding the relationship between men and women. However, in order to obtain the application of international instruments (signed and ratified charters, conventions or

declarations of principles) the Government is obliged to collaborate with partners to whom it is connected by means of bilateral or multilateral agreements. Despite the fact that institutions such as the United Nations, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the International Francophone Organization and civil society movements seek the materialization of all agreements, the gap between the spirit of the texts and national reality is wide.

Civil society proposals

In an attempt to find a way of acting directly on the endogenous factors of the current situation, we propose:

- Supporting inclusive management in conceiving, applying and following up economic and social development policies and programmes, in compliance with the commitments undertaken by each party.
- Fostering a return to the land, making family agriculture a pillar of growth, in contrast with agro-business, as indicated in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Document. With regard to food security and self-sufficiency, we request the establishment and application of medium to long term agricultural policy with wide participation of the actors involved and a consistent financing plan. The process for the drafting and approval of the Agro-Sylvo-Pastoral Act, whose application has been delayed, could be a source of inspiration.
- Carrying out a genuine land ownership reform with the purpose of re-establishing the rights of peasant farmers and local communities, granting them full and complete ownership of the land, which is their basic working tool. The imbalance between urban and rural settings regarding the right to property, which is stipulated by the Constitution, needs to be corrected.
- Modifying public and private consumption and investment models.
- Increasing the value of the contributions made by Senegalese who are part of the diaspora, by turning a large part of the money transfers from abroad into savings and investment.
- Guaranteeing equitable and effective geographic development in order to increase the size of the domestic market and make local populations sustainable.
- Carrying out a cultural revolution in order to truly change the mental outlook of peasant farmers and achieve the emergence of modern farming. This implies the eradication of illiteracy through the enrolment in schools of all school-age children (boys and girls) in rural areas, in order to provide them with the basic tools they need for the considered control of their environment.

- Standardizing mining concessions – particularly in the case of precious metals – in order to establish, amongst other things, national consultation procedures and prior actions to reinforce the capabilities of administrative personnel and local unofficial figures (entrepreneurs, unions, NGOs and human rights organizations), as well as a judicious use of the income which finances the national budget and consideration regarding the non-renewable nature of these resources.
- Improving the social direction of the institutional and regulatory framework of micro-finance and improving the social outcome of the Decentralized Financing Structures (SFD, in French).
- Promoting urban and peri-urban agriculture through micro-gardening, which could constitute a true green revolution within the urban and peri-urban environment and a means of developing activities which generate income for women and improve the food and nutrition of families, which would contribute to the good health of vulnerable populations and the fight against poverty. ■