



Conflict Factsheet

Protest against the Senhuile-Senethanol project in Senegal

Type of conflict Main	Intensity 2
Conflict Locality Senegal	Time 2011 –ongoing
Countries Senegal	Resources Agricultural / Pastoral Land



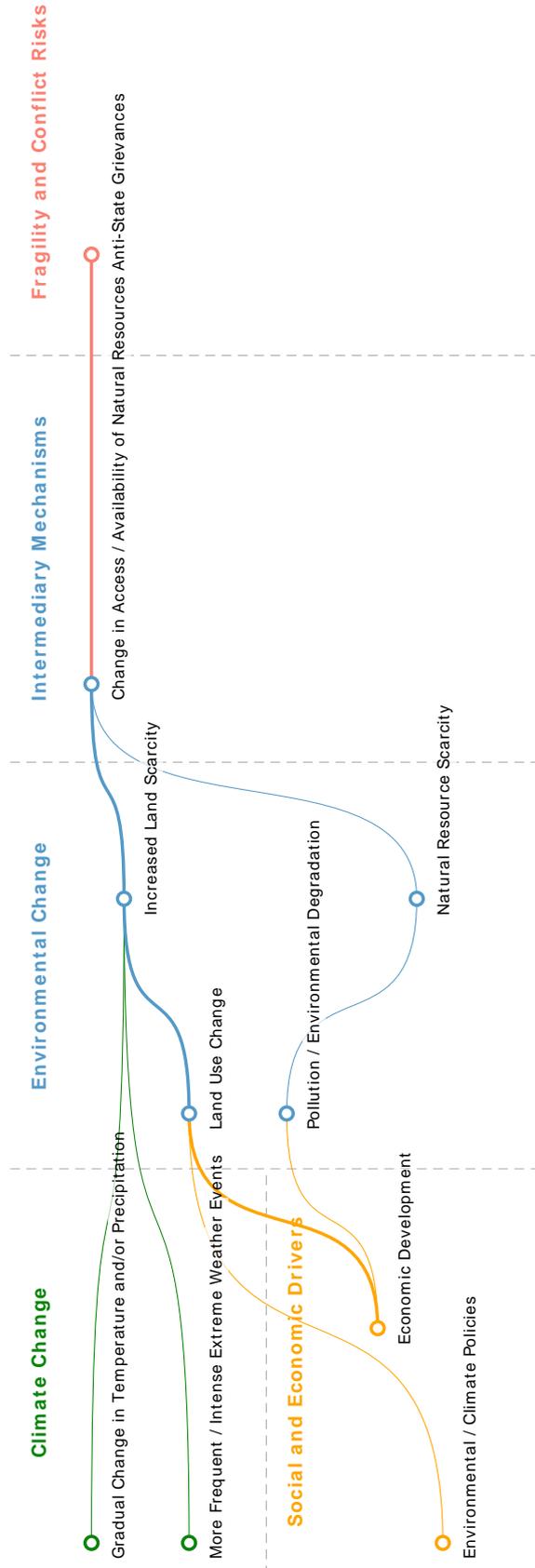
Unintended effects of climate policies

Conflict Summary

Large scale agribusiness projects in Senegal engendered protests from villagers and pastoralists occupying the land who already face pressures from the effects of climate change and political marginalisation. One example of such conflicts is over the "Senhuile-Senethanol project", where investment in biofuels linked to European markets for low carbon energy provoked strong resistance.



Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land

Insecure Land Tenure
Political Marginalization



Conflict History

Large scale agribusiness projects in Senegal engendered protests from villagers and pastoralists occupying the land who already face pressures from the effects of climate change and political marginalisation. One example of such a situation is the Senhuile-Senethanol project, where investments in biofuels linked to European markets for low carbon energy provoked strong resistance.

Tensions over biofuel production in northern Senegal

The project was first initiated in 2010/11 by Senethanol SA, a joint venture of investors based in Dakar, the USA and Italy ([Grain, 2018](#)). In 2011, twenty thousand hectares were leased to grow sweet potatoes for biofuel production in the Fanaye district. The local government approved the project without the consultation or participation of villagers living in the area, characterising the land as underused and unproductive. After local protests, national campaigns and a violent clash in October of the same year, twenty villagers were injured and two were killed. In response, the project was postponed and later relocated through two high level rulings by former president Abdoulaye Wade.

In 2012, the current president Macky Sall, reaffirmed the decrees to go ahead with the project in a new plot of twenty thousand hectares in the Ndiael Nature reserve, parts of which are classified as an endangered wetland safeguarded by the RAMSAR convention. Again there was a lack of consultation and participation of communities living in the area.

The Government eventually issued a land lease lasting fifty years to the biofuel initiative after the status of the protected forest, wetland and rangeland was downgraded to accommodate the project. In 2014, a change in management led to a short-lived aim to produce sunflowers for European markets. A further management change in 2016 led to the development of crops for local markets.

Later that year, the governor of the area downscaled the project to half its size, the motivations for this are not clear ([Prause, 2016](#)). It could be due to social movement pressure or the wishes of Senhuile Senethanol, the two reasons may not be mutually exclusive. The permanence of the downscaling is uncertain. That said, it is expected that the state will grant more control over land to the Senhuile Senethanol and future developments for the remaining land are anticipated.

Aside from the dispute over land rights, the project continues to generate strong opposition due to allegations of corruption and reports that numerous children drowned in insecure irrigation channels ([Jitendra, 2015](#)). As it stands, the venture is being instigated by Tampieri Financial Group and Senethanol SA ([Grain, 2018](#)).

On January 22, 2019 inhabitants of villages affected by the Senhuile Senethanol project marched to demand definitive legal rights to land access, announcing a memorandum to President Macky Sall to commit to issuing legally binding land rights to communities before the next elections ([Ndarinfo, 2019](#)).

Land reforms, marginalisation, and anti-state sentiment

National policies for land use planning promoting agribusiness to boost economic growth have led to the marginalization of previously held rights to resources and alienation of rural inhabitants. At the same time



projects have not adequately incorporated communities into planning processes. This suggests a need for greater consultation and participation of all stakeholders and clarity on legal access rights.

These policies were highly influenced by actors such as the World Bank, who aided governments in designing national plans to increase economic efficiency and food security regarding land use such as the Agricultural markets and Agribusiness development project (World Bank, 2009). This project among others were implemented at the level of the national government, suggesting a need for consultation and participation in higher level planning processes often inaccessible to affected groups.

Pastoralists across the Sahel region face multiple pressures from current land reform policies. These include decreased mobility, insecure land tenure and resultant reduction in access to pasture and water. This puts an added strain on commons and available resources and increases the likelihood of conflict between land users while adding to anti-state/corporate sentiment.

Discourses of underused or unexploited land and its representation within maps and other documents have encouraged land tenure reforms that have in effect marginalised Agro-pastoralist previously held rights to access and control over land (Crane & Meunier, 2018). Furthermore, recommendations to use fertile northern lands for agribusiness, (World Bank, 2009, 2015) prioritised these developments at the expense of local Agro-pastoralists. This can be seen in both national government policy, and local land allocations specific to the Senhuile-Senethanol project. In government approved project plans and maps, 31 out of 37 villages located within the proposed land lease were not indicated, adding to the characterisation of the land as underused (Prause, 2016).

Potential for aggravation in the wake of climate change

Climate change has also put pressure on the area and the Sahel region in general, where extreme weather events such as droughts and floods are projected to increase with greater climatic variability (USAID, 2017). This will affect both rainfed agriculture and livestock. Rising temperatures increase the risk of depleted total freshwater resources, while reduced groundwater recharge may combine with pollution from agribusiness to negatively impact water quality. The average temperature is projected to increase by 1.1 to 3.1°C by the 2060s. The projected rate of warming is even faster in the interior regions, where the Senhuile-Senethanol project is located (McSweeney et al., 2012). This will increase pressures on resources and could worsen tensions around this and similar projects.

A broader push for biofuel production in Senegal

In the context of multiple economic and environmental, and food crises over the past decade, large scale land acquisitions primarily in the global south have increased dramatically (Prause, 2016; Land Matrix, 2019; see also [case on global land grabbing](#)). In Sub Saharan Africa, biofuels make up the majority of these investments (Giovanetti, 2012). Both national and international policies relating to the promotion of biofuels are based on arguments surrounding food and energy security often echoing influential institutions such as the UN and World Bank.

In Senegal the total area leased or sold to agribusiness is estimated to be between two 250 and 800 hectares (Land Matrix, 2019; Prause, 2016). The land in the north of the country, which is used mainly by Pastoralists, is particularly attractive for such investments due to both fertile soils and its proximity to water resources from both the Senegal River and Lac de Guiers. The Senegalese Network against Land



Grabbing (Cadre de Réflexion et d'Action sur le Foncier au Sénégal) has outlined the risks to waterbodies associated with projects such as Senhuile-Senethanol. These include pollution from fertilisers and irrigation related to reduction of wetlands, a landscape necessary for migratory birdlife. They also highlight the many unfulfilled commitments to local people and the marginalization of their customary rights to land access and control.

Resolution Efforts

Corporate Social Responsibility

Following its relocation to Ndiel the Senhuile-Senethanol project later included a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) component, possibly to avoid similar protests to those which occurred in Fanaye). Several promises were made including the construction schools, places of worship, health centres, and sports infrastructure. So far only one school was built. The company implementing the project also promised improved access within the peripheral allocated to the company and claim to have donated animal feed. However, a community representative described the amount of grain given as a pittance in comparison to lost land. Furthermore affected villagers have no guarantee to continued future access to grazing land and there are no sanctions for non-compliance, meaning the company can detract or alter promises at any time (Benegiamo & Cirillo, 2014).

These efforts have largely been unsuccessful in mitigating conflict due to a lack of realistic assessment about the impacts of the project, clear legally binding commitment to providing and benefit-sharing, as well as meaningful consultation and participation in the design of the project. This led to the infringement of rights and access to resources and resultant resistance from affected communities.

According to requirements under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, corporations have an obligation to respect human rights throughout their operations. However, these are not binding under international law (UNOHCHR, 2011; 1). So far corporate social responsibility (CSR) measures carried out by Senethanol SA such as an environmental and social impact study (EIES) and promises made to communities have not changed either the public view of the project or brought meaningful long term legal concessions to grant communities land access. Despite the company's promises to build schools, provide jobs and grant temporary access to herders, the (CSR) cannot be considered to have mitigated the projects impact or the grievances of villagers.

Social mobilisation against large scale land acquisitions

Grass roots initiatives and NGOs in Senegal have had mixed results in reshaping land use policies and stopping projects such as the Senhuile-Senethanol project. To date, the Senegalese network of NGOs against land grabbing (Cadre de Réflexion et d'Action sur le Foncier au Sénégal) managed to stop or delay some land transactions. For example following a nationwide campaign, a high court decision temporarily postponed a land acquisition in the community of Diokoul (Acquino, 2013). The organisation is also involved in a wider campaign for land reform which would counteract the precarity of local framers and pastoralists, by preventing leasing of state owned land to private companies. The strategy of national NGOs to oppose the Senhuile-senethanol project was also highly successful in mobilising international



support from NGOs such as GRAIN, ActionAid, and the Oakland institute putting further pressure on the government and company implementing the project.

Intensities & Influences



INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity



Human Suffering



INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

Yes



Salience with nation

Municipal



Mass displacement

None



Cross Border Mass Displacement

No



Resolution Success

Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been partially addressed.





Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Compensation

Compensation as well as jobs were promised to affected communities, however there is no evidence to suggest this promise was fulfilled.

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Environmental restoration & protection

Promises relating to an environmental and social impact study were made, however so far this has not changed either the public view of the project or any concessions or changes to access and ownership of land (Actionaid, 2014). The conflict is ongoing although around half of the land set aside for the development is currently being used for biofuels and other crops with future developments for the remaining land being anticipated. (Jitendra, 2015).

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Promoting social change

Through various media campaigns and demonstrations, social movements and NGOs had mixed results in reshaping land use policies and stopping projects. To date, the national network of NGOs against land grabbing (Cade de Réflexion et d'Action sur le Foncier au Sénégal) has managed to stop some land transactions, while delaying others. On January 22 2019 inhabitants of villages marched to demand definitive legal rights to land access issuing a memorandum to President Macky Sall to commit to issuing legally binding land rights to communities before the next elections.

2

Resources and Materials

References with URL

[Aquino, P \(2013\). Document de position du Cadre de Réflexion et d'Action sur le Foncier sur la réforme foncière au Sénégal](#)

[Benegiamo, Cirillo \(2014\). No Land No Future. A community's struggle to reclaim their land: The Senhuile-Senethanol investment in Ndiael, Senegal. Johannesburg: Actionaid](#)

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[Prause, L \(2016\) The success and failure of social movement actors' framing strategies in conflicts over large-scale land transformations. Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue canadienne d'études du développement](#)

[UNFCCC \(2009\) United Nations Framework Convention On Climate Change. Investment and Financial Flows to address Climate Change: An Update](#)



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[USAID \(2017\) Climate Change Risk Profile Senegal.](#)

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Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/protest-against-senhuile-senethanol-project-senegal>