

Keywords:

Livelihoods, land policy framework and guidelines, good governance, urbanisation, land rights

Policy pointers

Senegal's government should take the opportunity to address challenges in the governance of rural lands provided by ongoing national land reform processes.

The National Land Law Reform Commission process should ensure that reforms provide secure access to, and control of, land for family farming, which sustains the majority of rural households.

The Commission should also consider different mechanisms and models of large-scale agriculture that foster more inclusive rural development and assure better livelihood opportunities and compensation.

The Senegalese government should develop policies that support the potential of young people to develop agricultural land and other income-generating opportunities.

Land access for Senegal's small producers under threat

Senegal currently has a complex and poorly regulated system of land governance, which — combined with an urbanisation trend and increasing outsider interest — is leading to land privatisation and a consequent reduction in the availability of cultivable land for small producers. Young farmers in particular are struggling to gain sufficient access to land to maintain viable enterprises. Here we draw on field research to understand the drivers and impacts of trends in land use and ownership in rural Senegal, and suggest that government-backed land reform offers the best immediate chance of addressing the power imbalances that threaten rural livelihoods.

This briefing draws on a field research project on trends in land access and use in rural Senegal in the last ten years.¹ It examines two areas: the Delta in the western part of the River Senegal Valley, and the Niayes region (a band of land that runs north along the coast from the city of Dakar to the southern end of the Delta). Several factors are affecting land availability, especially for smallholders: the expansion of urban development, issues around land governance and land sales, increased investment in commercial agriculture, and the particular issues raised when the investor is the state. Each of these four factors is addressed below.

1. Urbanisation and shrinking agricultural land

Senegal's population is growing at a rate of 2.7 per cent per year;² combined with an overall trend of people moving from rural to urban and peri-urban areas, this has led to an escalation in demand for housing and the expansion of cities. Homes are being built on cultivable land, and many former farmers and herders have become daily labourers or sought other income sources.

The government's strategy is to modernise rural and peri-urban areas by transforming them into big cities (Box 1 provides an example of this). One of the most striking changes in the southern Niayes region in the last decade has been the rapid urbanisation of the Dakar hinterland. Peri-urban development there started slowly in the 1990s and 2000s as city dwellers — including high-ranking religious and political dignitaries — bought land for orchards and 'weekend farms', and it accelerated as some purchasers built second homes on their new holdings. Rural land users did not drive this urbanisation trend, although some former farmers put the money they made from selling their land into modern housing, further contributing to and becoming part of the process. Other farmers, who are resisting the trend, are struggling to maintain agricultural production.

2. Land governance and unofficial land sales

Senegal's land is governed largely according to customary practices, despite land reforms — especially the 1964 Land Tenure Law (*Loi sur le*

The study found that the investment required to secure access to water is often beyond the reach of smallholder farmers

Domaine National, LDN) — aimed at introducing a modern administrative system. Land classified as 'national domain' (*domaine national*)³ cannot be subject to ownership; instead, it is to be held in trust by the state and governed by municipal councils. But the LDN is poorly enforced,

customary rules still dominate and communities continue to apply their own rules and practices — with land being passed down through the family like any other asset.

The allocation of the national domain commonly takes place

through municipal councils, and such allocation is seen to amount effectively to official recognition of land sales. Officially, land is not for sale, but the land allocation procedure is not a free service and each council sets its own rates. Municipal councils sometimes formalise land sales retrospectively, registering the land in the name of the new 'owner' and removing that of the previous one. Such transactions are most common in areas where competition for land is strong, but they are also occurring in areas where only rain-fed agriculture is practised, suggesting an expansion of this trend beyond the most populated areas. Land in the Niayes region is classified as national domain and therefore should be imprescriptible and inalienable, making it impossible for individual citizens to gain ownership rights. In practice, however, the land is subject to numerous transactions.

3. Increasing number of large commercial agriculture projects

National policies encouraging private investment in Senegal have brought many large investors — such as Société de Cultures Légumières

(SCL), the Grands Domaines du Sénégal, Soldive and Société de conserves alimentaires au Sénégal — to the Delta, which has huge agricultural potential. Our study examined the impacts of the Franco-Senegalese company SCL,⁴ which arrived in the community of Diama in 2006. SCL exports most of the vegetables⁵ it produces to Europe (mainly the United Kingdom) and enjoys a number of tax concessions in Senegal, including a ten-year exemption from value-added tax and customs duties. SCL has amassed a substantial landholding in the Delta — more than 2,000 hectares (ha) — that is not yet fully under cultivation, and the company is submitting applications for land in other communities. SCL employs about 1,500 daily labourers in the growing season; however, it does not work in partnership with the local producers whose land it has purchased or with affected producers in Diama. The company's business model involves retaining exclusive control over decision making on company land and in the entire value chain (ie production, processing and marketing). The only relationship that landholders and producers have with the company is as employees; they are paid 2,000 West African CFA francs (FCFA, US\$1.00 = 608.6 FCFA) per day as, for example, field workers, packers, mechanics and drivers. Moreover, SCL operations in the Delta have led to a massive influx of agricultural labourers from other areas willing to accept any wages and their presence represents a threat to local workers relying on SCL for paid employment.

4. State-led agricultural development

Our study also examined two state-led investment projects: the Programme to Promote Rice Partnerships in the Delta (3PRD) and the Senegal Agricultural Markets Development (PDMAS) project. In both projects, the state manages the land with support from donors such as the World Bank and the Agence Française de Développement (AFD).⁶ Both use private-partnership models in which private investors are responsible for developing certain infrastructure and receive state support in mobilising finance. Although both projects involve small producers in the value chain, neither has emphasised help for such producers to gain access to land. Small producers in the village of Ndiagambal reported that the land allocations for the PDMAS project were very slow, with highly unfavourable conditions of access (for example, land costs 700,000 FCFA per ha, which is beyond the means of most local people). Developed parcels are too expensive

Box 1. Village extension in Sangalkam

The municipal council of Sangalkam launched a major housing development programme in 2003 with the aim of alleviating overcrowded living conditions, thereby transforming a once rural area into an urban setting.⁷ Around 125 hectares of land were subdivided and sold off as housing plots in the villages of Bambylor, Kounoune, Ndiakhirat and Niakourab, and these sales were followed by a number of private and public initiatives. About 764 hectares of land were formally developed in the Sangalkam community between 2003 and 2009. When combined with various other nearby developments, well over 1,000 hectares were developed in the area. The expansion continues today with major backing from the state; new projects include large hotel complexes, modern trading platforms, sports and leisure centres, and various services.⁸

for family farmers in the village of Boundoum, thus favouring larger private investors. Only 1 per cent of local producers in Boundoum (fewer than 30 people) have gained access to land developed by the project.

The PDMAS project has influenced a change in land ownership in Ndiagambal towards outside investors (mainly agri-businesses). It controls 5,085 ha of land in and around the village, whose residents have access to fields on only 212 ha. While the main beneficiaries of land developed by the projects in Boundoum and Ndiagambal have been larger-scale private investors, some less well-resourced youth and women have been able to access land through a 10 per cent quota for developed plots. In general though, smallholders have been excluded as both projects have targeted larger producers on plots of a minimum of 5 ha. It is notable that this represents a changed policy emphasis — in the 1990s, state land development initiatives targeted smallholder farmers (those with about 1–2 ha per family or 0.4 ha per adult).

Impacts on farming communities

The trend towards greater land ownership by larger-scale private investors is having particular impacts on Senegal's traditional farming communities. Outsiders are creating limited job opportunities in rural areas, but they are also occupying land that might otherwise be available to local farmers. They also consume other resources, such as water — in the Niayes region, the study found that the investment required to secure access to water is often beyond the reach of smallholder farmers (see Table 1).

The future for young farmers

The study estimated that 97.5 per cent and 89.1 per cent of young people in the Delta and the Niayes region, respectively, have neither land nor livestock. In rural Senegal, land belongs to all family members but is managed and redistributed by heads of households. Young men and women, therefore, are highly dependent on their elders for gaining access to land. They usually do so through inheritance or rental agreements, which limits their production capacity and ability to operate autonomously.

The young are the largest demographic group in rural areas in Senegal, but they have little social or political power because older people (mostly men) control land and the means of production. Young people in the Delta consulted in the research complained about their lack of representation in producers' unions, which means that little account is taken of their needs when decisions are made

Table 1. Investments needed to exploit land as a farmer, Niayes region

Item	Cost (CFA francs)	Notes
Mini borehole	450,000	Two mini boreholes are usually needed to properly irrigate a field
Motor pump	700,000	Needs replacement every 2–3 years
Hose	200,000	
Fencing	50,000	
Sharecrop (Mbay Seddo) for five workers	Pay later	
Ten pots of seeds	240,000	
Fertiliser	20,700	
Petrol	675,000	

about allocating developed plots or providing access to credit and information.

In the current era of rapid social change, traditional standards are no longer recognised universally. Young people in rural areas want greater autonomy from household heads, as well as more money to meet their own needs and to support their own family units. They tend to see the world differently from their elders, have different patterns of consumption and some are more entrepreneurial. Many have successful production strategies, which usually involve renting cultivable land where they can develop their own plots. Those without the means to rent tend to work elsewhere in the agricultural value chain, such as in processing irrigated rice (in the Delta), transporting agricultural produce to large markets across the country (in the Niayes region), or selling produce.

The data collected in the Delta show that young men see agriculture as an important segment of the rural labour market that can provide them with consistent income, but they need developed land and longer-term, low-interest finance.

Conclusion

Land access and ownership in rural Senegal has changed significantly in the last ten years due to increasing trends of urbanisation, poor governance, and private and state investment in agricultural and other commercial ventures. Less land — and less productive land — is available for family farmers, especially the young. Ongoing efforts at land reform through the Land Law Reform Commission must:

- Seek to address power imbalances, which are being exaggerated as part of recent changes, so as to sustain rural productivity and equitable rural development

- Consider different mechanisms and models of large-scale agriculture that foster more inclusive rural development and assure better livelihood opportunities and compensation
- Provide secure access to, and control of, land for family farming, which sustains the majority of rural households.

To support this, the Senegalese government should develop policies that support the

potential of young people to develop agricultural land and other income-generating opportunities.

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Knowledge Products

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This research was funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) with some complementary funding from supporters of IIED's strategic work: Danida (Denmark), Irish Aid and Sida (Sweden). However the views expressed by the authors in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of IFAD, Danida, Irish Aid, Sida, IIED or IPAR.



Notes

¹ Niang *et al.* (forthcoming) Understanding changing land access and use by the rural poor in Senegal. IIED, London. / ² Agence nationale de la statistique et de la démographie (ANSD) (2016) Situation Economique et Sociale du Sénégal en 2013 (p36). / ³ Under the law, land in the national domain belongs to the nation. The state holds — but does not own — land in the national domain. The only way land can be taken out of the national domain is to register it in the name of the state; under the law, this can only be done if it is to be used for operations that are in the public interest. / ⁴ Established in 2006 and managed by a French national, SCL was incorporated as a limited public company under Senegalese law. / ⁵ Mainly beans, chillies, sweetcorn, squash and cucumbers. / ⁶ CIRAD (2013) *Capacités et pratiques de gestion des terres et arrangements fonciers avec l'agrobusiness dans les communautés rurales de la zone PDIDAS*. Draft. / ⁷ Sarr, NFM (2011) Etude de l'impact de la périurbanisation en zone humide: Cas de la Communauté Rurale de Sangalkam. Mémoire de fin de formation. Département Aménagement du Territoire Environnement et Gestion Urbaine, Ecole Supérieure d'Economie Appliquée. / ⁸ General policy speech delivered to the Senegalese National Assembly by Prime Minister Mohamed Boun Abdallah Dione on 11 November 2014.