



COMMUNITIES HIT BY CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE COAST OF SENEGAL

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Ndeye Yacine Dieng has lived in Bargny, Senegal, since the early 1960s. The area is heavily affected by climate-induced sea level rise. "Most of our belongings and our best young people are being taken by the sea," she says. Djibril Dia/Arona Wade/Oxfam

Partners working with Oxfam are helping seaside towns adapt, survive, and advocate for more support to overcome losses.

On the long sandy beach in a community called Bargny, there are abandoned homes collapsing into the surf. High waves running up the beach have overwhelmed sand bags, old tires, and other make-shift barriers, rendering these homes clogged with wet sand and uninhabitable.



Ndeye Yacine Dieng has lived in Bargny since the early 1960s. "We had homes, mosques, and football fields here. The sea was far," says the mother of seven and a grandmother of eight, as waves break on the beach and water swirls around her feet. "Now it is much closer, and we are suffering."

Bargny is about 40 kilometers (about 25 miles) from Dakar, Senegal's seaside capital, and just one of the many seacoast communities here affected by climate-induced coastal erosion. Dieng says as many as 1,500 people need to be relocated. In the meantime, they are staying with family and friends, sometimes with more than 10 people to a room.



Homes abandoned to rising sea levels line the beach in Bargny, Senegal. Djibril Dia/Arona Wade/Oxfam

New port facilities serving an emerging offshore oil and gas industry, storage areas for mineral exports, and a coal-burning power plant (built in 2008) have all further constrained availability of land for people displaced by the rising sea level.

These developments are also making it harder for fishing families to make a decent living—fishing boats are prohibited from areas near the offshore oil and gas facilities. The colorful boats now line the beach in Bargny, sitting idle, as are their crew, and the women who smoke and sell the fish.

"When the power plant starts, all other activity stops," says Fatou Samba, who represents a thousand-woman association of fish processors in and around Bargny. "This toxic activity does not go with food processing."

With traditional ways of making a living rendered impractical, and displaced families struggling to find new homes, young people in particular face tough choices, according to Ndeye Yacine Dieng.

"The very young people leave, they go to Europe to look for work...they can't withstand the poverty here," she says, standing on the beach just barely above the breaking waves, squinting her eyes in the late afternoon sun. "In recent years, some of them have died at sea trying to go to Europe."

"Most of our belongings and our best young people are being taken by the sea," she says.



Oxfam America President Abby Maxman passes by idle fishing boats on the beach in Bargny, Senegal. Increased offshore oil and gas activity is constraining fishing in this area of Senegal's coast. Djibril Dia/Arona Wade/Oxfam

The people on Senegal's coast who are affected by climate change are responsible for only a tiny fraction of the greenhouse gas emissions causing the sea level rise destroying their homes. But they must deal with all the problems. To assist them, Oxfam has established a network of communities affected by climate change known by its French initials RESSAC (Reseau Sénégalais des Acteurs du Climat) that is helping organize citizens in areas like Bargny to advocate for better respect for their rights to live in a clean environment, access to land for families displaced by climate change, and to be consulted about major industrial infrastructure projects that will affect their lives and livelihoods.

With an eye to the future, Oxfam's partner Teranga Lab is mobilizing young people in coastal areas to campaign for the government to help communities adapt to and survive climate change. They are raising awareness through podcasts, blogs, and videos that tell stories about how climate change is affecting communities and what their government and others can do to help affected people.



Diabé Ba has lived in the Thiawlene neighborhood of Rufisque her entire life, and says that people are changing the way they manage waste. "Now, we don't have garbage everywhere." Djibril Dia/Arona Wade/Oxfam

"THE SEA IS NOT A GARBAGE BIN"

Next to the shore in Rufisque, near a small cemetery, is a shipping container that serves as an office for an environmental group called Recycl'Or. The organization is led by the visionary environmentalist Idrissa Thiaw, who is working outside under an orange tarp rigged up like an awning for shade. He and his colleague Walinata Seck are taking care of some paperwork, and discussing plans for hosting visitors that afternoon.

Recycl'Or is an environmental group with one basic message: "La mer n'est pas une poubelle," Thiaw says. The sea is not a garbage bin.

As an alternative to throwing plastic and other waste onto the beach and in the ocean, Recycl'Or started an ambitious solid waste management project that encourages people to recycle nearly all their garbage. Recycl'Or collects plastic, metal, cardboard, and paper, and sells it.

The office is surrounded by huge sacks full of separated waste waiting to be picked up. The recycled trash is just one part of Recycl'Or's vision for Rufisque, a gritty town living in the shadow of a cement plant 30 kilometers (18 miles) south of Dakar. The organization is establishing what it calls a Community Environmental Zone, or ZEC (its French abbreviation). Recycl'Or has recruited and trained people from 250 households in Rufisque, many of them from the Thiawlene neighborhood near Recycl'Or's headquarters, to recycle their waste, practice organic gardening, plant trees, and live a more environmentally sustainable life.

"We go house to house to look at waste problems, and find solutions," says Walinata Seck. "Since women manage waste in the household, we first engage women with training and communication," she says. All the participating households get a garbage can system that helps them separate their trash, and training on how to identify the different types of waste.

One of the participants is Diabé Ba, a 53-year-old mother of six who says that the ZEC has dramatically changed her neighborhood. "Before we threw our garbage in the road," she says. "But now we recycle, using different containers to sort the waste."

Everyone is getting involved, she says. "I see 5-year-old children picking up plastic bottles, and disposing of them properly. Now, we don't have garbage everywhere."

HOLDING BACK THE OCEAN

The beach at Thiawlene has receded significantly over the years, according to Idrissa Thiaw. "Thiawlene is the most vulnerable part of Rufisque," he says. "Many of the houses near the beach have been destroyed, and many families have been displaced, some have had to move as far as eight kilometers away."



Walinata Seck works at Recycl'Or, an environmental group that collaborates closely with Oxfam's partner Teranga Lab. "We go house to house to look at waste problems, and find solutions," she says. Djibril Dia/Arona Wade/Oxfam

To hold back the sea, the city built a sea wall of huge rocks along three quarters of a kilometer of the shoreline. Although on this clear day a few larger waves breaking on the wall of boulders shoot spray over the wall and onto people walking just inland, the sea wall is making Thiawlene more secure for now.



Recycl'Or is working with Teranga Lab, with support from Oxfam, along with other members of the RESSAC network to help people in the neighborhood learn the key skills they need to convince the local and national government to take action, beyond building sea walls, to help their community adapt and survive climate change. The next urgent area could be upgrading the sanitation systems in Rufisque that are vulnerable to flooding.

Giuleye Diop, 64, oversees Recycl'Or's organic farming program in Thiawlene. He has lived in Rufisque for 60 years, and has a vision for what the future should be like for his children and grandchildren.

"I want people to live in a good environment, with trees, farms with productive agriculture, and fish in the ocean. I'd like to see a healthy environment on the land and the sea."

