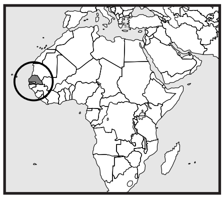
SENEGAL

Corruption, poverty and other weapons



Thousands of light arms are in the hands of the population; the political system is weak and ineffective; poverty is rife and corruption is the norm. Given these conditions, in spite of efforts by civil society, it is impossible to build social, cultural and economic systems that guarantee human security in Senegal and bring it within reach of the Millennium Development Goals.

ADESEN

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Light arms and political failure

The proliferation of light weapons in Western Africa has without doubt nurtured more conflict in this region than anywhere else in the world. Estimates suggest that over 8 million light arms are in circulation in the region, causing thousands of deaths. Sixty percent of the victims are women and children. Many more people have been mutilated and orphaned.

Recent conflicts, especially in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, have exacerbated the situation in an area well known for its political instability. Within this regional context, national tensions in Senegal are running high.

On 19 March 2000 the heterogeneous liberal coalition of Abdoulaye Wade won a landslide electoral victory over socialist president Abdou Diouf, who everyone identified with the crisis. The change in government was achieved by mobilisations involving the entire population and above all a fierce struggle on the part of civil society organisations; however, it did not end the practices of the former regime. The President and his cabinet find themselves in an unenviable position amid growing discontent, due to scandals such as the "Joola" case[1] and the exposé by Aboul L Coulibaly,[2] among others, which have discredited the Government.

Wade's Government has been repeatedly accused of instigating attacks on the premises of opposition parties. The biggest scandal occurred in October 2003, when Talla Sylla, leader of the Alliance "Jëf-Jël" opposition party, was attacked with a hammer. Members of other opposition parties, including Djibo Ka, the leader of Democratic Renewal, blamed the Government for the attack. Thousands of people demonstrated on the streets of the capital, Dakar, in November, to express their repudiation of the attack.

Burn the guns

Civil society has launched a campaign against the circulation of light arms. The centre of activity has been the town of Ziguinchor in Casamance province, chosen because of the war of secession there. This has lasted for more than 20 years and caused the displacement of several thousand Senegalese, and the deaths of hundreds more.

Under the slogan "Let's control weapons", a one-day event was organised to coincide with the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The aim was to raise community awareness of the dangers posed by retaining, using and circulating weapons, and was mainly directed at young people. Other objectives were to inform the authorities and the general population about the aims of the campaign, and to reflect on human security by initiating a civilian-military dialogue with an expert panel composed of members of the military and NGO representatives. A high point of this event was the symbolic burning of weapons.

The Council of Support for NGOs in Senegal (CONGAD) made its views about political violence known through a public communiqué: "…there is no excuse [that can justify] acts of violence. There are means available to stop the wave of assassinations, murder attempts and assaults. It is enough for the State simply to fulfil its designated functions of overseeing impartial application of the law, protecting individual freedoms and punishing those who wish to establish the rule of violence in our democracy."[3] CONGAD called on the President to co-ordinate with religious, cultural and political figures and the media to stop the spiral of violence and insecurity. "It is intolerable that the exercise of the freedom of expression should be punished by assaults against individuals' physical and moral integrity," CONGAD declared, adding that impunity is a violation of human rights and encourages bad governance. The communiqué also defended the freedom of the press and condemned the expulsion of Radio France International's correspondent Sophie Malibeaux, as well as condemning the assassination in Abidjan, the capital of Côte d'Ivoire, of Jean Hélène, who worked for the same broadcaster.

Taking the view that poverty contributes to generating violence, CONGAD called on the Government of Senegal to "fight energetically" against it. But the fight against poverty must begin by eliminating corruption - a step that those in power seem reluctant to take.

The cost of corruption

Corruption has a high price, which is paid by the national economy. The total loss due to corruption is estimated at USD 210 million from public expenditure alone. The volume of goods purchased by the State through the central administration, not counting brokering agents and public sector companies, amounted to approximately USD 147 million in 1999. In 2001, directly negotiated purchases, which are even more prone to corruption, were USD 43 million. Other purchases represented 70% of those authorised, that is USD 30 million. Nearly a quarter of the budget for buying in labour services was spent on directly negotiated contracts. Thus 70% of the consolidated purchasing budget was apparently spent on directly negotiated deals.[4]

In the private sector, according to figures from Transparency International which were confirmed by a World Bank survey, "the excess costs generated by corruption amount to between 25% and 30%".[5]

The draft decree to create a Council to monitor good governance and fight corruption is no doubt praiseworthy. However civil society is not entirely

1 On 26 September 2002 the "Joola", a ferry with capacity for 550 passengers, sank due to overloading when sailing from Ziguinchor in the south of Senegal to Dakar. Originally, the Government announced there had been 1,100 deaths, while the press claimed there had been nearly 2,000. Only 65 people survived. The Government finally decided to pay compensation to the families of the estimated 1,865 lives claimed in the disaster.

2 In his book *Wade, un opposant au pouvoir. L'alternance piégée,* La Sentinelle, 2003, journalist Aboul L Coulibaly explores the gap between the expectations of the people of Senegal after the historic change in March 2000 and subsequent political reality. The book's main theme is the excessive centralisation of power in the hands of President Wade ("a republican monarch"), his party and cronies. This far-from-flattering portrayal accuses Wade of a lack of professionalism, mistakes in the rush to establish economic priorities, liquidation of public companies to the benefit of foreign investors, liberalisation of peanut production - allowing speculators to cheat peasant farmers - and grandiose, impossible projects. The author also denounces attempts by the Government to interfere with the press and the judicial system, and attacks the corruption that prevails in public purchasing.

3 CONGAD. Public communiqué, 25 October 2003.

4 *Walfadjri* newspaper. 8 January 2003.

5 *Ibid.*

satisfied with the proposed Council and has expressed reservations about its potential effectiveness in three areas: awareness-raising, prevention and sanctions.

In order to promote transparency and good governance, the watchdog Council has drawn up a global communications strategy for maintaining, on the one hand, a high level of public services, and on the other hand, to publicise and reward virtuous behaviour, in both the public and private sectors.

As for prevention, no concrete proposals have been made. And civil society organisations have major doubts about penalties for corruption, especially since so many questions are not addressed at all in the draft decree: for example, the need for declarations of disclosure of personal wealth.

Political will is required to make the Council effective by endowing it with the powers it needs. Professional or banking secrecy cannot be allowed to hinder its work. Otherwise, Council requests for documents from authorities will be flatly refused, since there are no coercive measures in place.

In order to ensure institutional autonomy, the Council should be created by law, incorporating the draft decree and adjusting its statutes in line with existing international conventions on corruption.

The 2004 budget: continuing poverty

According to the World Bank, 65% of households live in poverty, in spite of the fact that Senegal was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to embark on a structural adjustment programme to re-launch the economy in 1984.[6]

Poverty can only be combatted with a bold economic policy aimed at strong, continuous growth led by dynamic sectors of the economy, and by ensuring equitable distribution of the benefits of growth. This should be reflected in the Government's budget.

Unfortunately, Senegal's budget for 2004 maintains the status quo. This can be illustrated by examining key elements of the economy as they appear in the budget. The following four indicators, together with inflation (which has remained within acceptable limits), comprise the basis of any budget's macroeconomic and financial framework:

The 2002 growth rate

Wealth-generating activities, reflected in the growth rate, are in an alarming state. After controversies over the 2002 growth rate, the draft budget for 2004 at last showed that in 2002 Senegal's growth rate was actually 1.1%, although it had at first been forecast at 5.7%, a prediction that was later revised to 2.4%.[7]

The balance of trade

The balance of trade remains negative, and the deficit has in fact got worse. In 2002 the balance of trade was USD -740 million, and the estimate for 2003 was USD -790 million - an increased deficit of USD 50 million.[8]

The investment rate

Senegal is also failing on this front. In fact, in the last 15 years investment has ranged from 15% to 20%. This year the investment rate is expected to increase to 19.7% and the estimate for 2005 is 20%. These levels of investment are clearly inadequate to promote strong growth and place the country in the category of emerging economies, whose investment rates are typically between 25% and 30%.[9]

External debt

According to World Bank figures for 2001, the country's external debt is valued at USD 4,000 million, with an annual servicing cost of USD 214.2 million. And the debt continues to grow. The accumulation of old debt is too heavy for a country burdened by the problematic economic structures analysed above. The amount owed is equivalent to 60% of GDP and represents a debt of USD 400 for each of Senegal's 10 million inhabitants. In a country where 65% of households are living below the poverty line, this burden is intolerable.

In conclusion, from every analytical viewpoint, the proposed budget for 2004 signals no changes.

If present rates of growth continue to be weak and erratic, together with investment rates far below those required for the economy to emerge from stagnation, structural deficits in the balance of trade, and a national debt amounting to more than half of GDP, the country can only sink into abject poverty, which no sectoral plan will be able to reduce, let alone eradicate.

And the Millennium Development Goals will not be met. ■

6 EPPS 2001. Senegal Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, World Bank, 2001.

7 Budget proposal 2004.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*