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**The Challenges of Urban Growth in  
West Africa: The Case of Dakar, Senegal**

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## **Introduction**

Sub-Saharan Africa is becoming increasingly urbanized. If Southern African is the most urbanized region on the continent, West Africa ranks second. In 2000, 53.9% of southern Africa's population was urban, while 39.3% of West Africans lived in urban areas. By 2030, it is estimated that Africa as a whole will be an "urban" continent, having reached the threshold of 50% urban residents. Estimates are that southern Africa will then be 68.6% urban and West Africa 57.4% urban. In contrast, East Africa will be less than 33.7% urban (UN Habitat 2007:337). Although most African cities remain small by world standards, their rates of growth are expected to be greater than areas that already include large cities. For example, the urban population of Senegal, the focus of this paper is expected grow by 2.89%/year from 2000-2010 and by 2.93% from 2010 to 2020. In contrast, the urban population of India is expected to grow by 2.52% from 2000-2010 and 2.50% from 2010 to 2020 (UN Habitat 2007:348). This growing urban population faces many challenges; it needs to meet its basic needs for housing, work, and food without damaging the environment. However, these growth rates make it difficult to plan effectively and to find sufficient resources to meet these challenges.

Many urban residents find it difficult to earn adequate incomes and find appropriate housing. Although the two are linked, it is important to distinguish between life-style poverty (lack of assets) and housing poverty (Chaurasia 2007). The ability to earn incomes and generate wealth is linked to the structure of the national and urban economy, while housing poverty is directly linked to the housing market and urban growth policies. Therefore, residents of a city like Mumbai, with a booming economy but a notoriously bad housing market, may confront housing poverty even as they move out of life-style poverty. In contrast, many African cities face

economies negatively impacted by previous structural adjustment programs as well as housing stock that has not kept pace with their rapid growth. Many urban residents in West Africa face both life style and housing poverty.

Therefore, many live in slums, which UN Habitat defines as neighborhoods lacking at least one of the following characteristics: adequate drinking water, adequate sanitation, good quality durable housing, adequate living space, and security of tenure (UN Habitat 2007:334). In India, it is estimated that 60.8% of urban residents lived in slums in 1990, but this decreased to 55.5% in 2001. In Senegal, in contrast, an estimated 77.6% of urban residents lived in slums in 1990, but this decreased very little, to 76.4% in 2001 (UN Habitat 2007:352).

National governments often consider both lack of assets/income-earning and adequate housing as indicators of poverty and consider the improvement of urban living and working conditions an integral part of poverty alleviation efforts. On the one hand, they implement income-generation projects to improve living standards directly. On the other, they seek to improve urban living conditions through road and other urban transport projects and construction of water and sewage infrastructure. They standardize lot sizes and placement. New projects also aim to protect water sources, watersheds, river banks, and sea shores.

However, addressing the needs of the urban poor is far from the only motivation behind urban development projects. African planners also envision their cities as centers for economic and cultural development, as places that show what politicians and planners consider the best of the society. Thus, municipalities and national governments embark on other kinds of building projects such as administrative and commercial centers and even new capitals. These projects, which may seek to situate cities as national or global centers, often pay little attention to the urban poor. In fact, they often displace the urban poor in their wake, accentuating their

impoverishment rather than addressing either income or housing poverty. Not only do the poor not benefit from this development, but they find themselves even worse off.

The paper is based primarily upon results from a field study done in June of 2008, complemented by some documentary sources. During this field research, I had the opportunity to talk to urban planners, social scientists, and representatives of international donors, development programs, and non-governmental organizations about their understanding of the issues facing Dakar and some of the possible solutions. The paper looks at some of the problems facing Dakar, Senegal, as its government and population attempts to create a 21<sup>st</sup> century city that meets the needs of growing numbers of Senegalese. After an introductory section introduces some of the challenges facing urban growth, the body of the paper turns to some of the key problems facing Dakar. These include problems of environmental pollution, the challenge of providing housing and essential services to a growing population, the challenge of carrying out adequate planning, and several socio-cultural issues that create problems for urban Senegalese. A concluding section raises some questions for future research.

### **Dakar: The Challenges of Urban Growth**

Dakar is the largest city in Senegal and the national capital. Like Mumbai, it is a port city created during by colonial intervention and located on a peninsula (Figure 1). The city began in a small space, the tip of the Peninsula, now known as the Plateau, and its adjoining neighborhoods. It then spread northward, and now people are moving east onto the mainland to find affordable housing. However, this lengthens the time of the commute into the city and increases problems of transportation.

Nevertheless, despite the constraints to growth within urban Dakar, the city has grown

substantially and disproportionately, now housing the majority of Senegal's urban residents. The population of the Dakar metropolitan area grew from some 374,700 in 1961 (right after independence in 1960) to 2.77 million in 2005; it is estimated that it will have a population of 5 million inhabitants in 2025 (Groupement CAUS-BCEOM 2007:25). Despite various attempts to decentralize development opportunities, the Dakar region is now the home of 24% of the Senegalese population even though it covers only 0.28% of the national territory (Groupement CAUS-BCEOM 2007:14). The Dakar region contains more than 80% of Senegal's permanent employees and more than 90% of the employees in the sectors of transport, finance, and industry (Groupement CAUS-BCEOM 2007:14). Although Dakar produces much of the nation's wealth, it is also responsible for much national consumption and uses a large part of the country's resources.

At the westernmost point in Africa, Dakar has developed an active port that serves especially the Americas and Europe. In recent years, many international firms and organizations have chosen to place their West African representatives there because of its easy access to Europe and its political stability. For example, after the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire, many organizations previously located in Abidjan transferred their personnel to Dakar.

All these factors have encouraged the growth of Dakar and its metropolitan region. However this rapid growth has led to multiple problems. First is the issue of providing employment for the growing number of migrants to the city; even though Dakar has an active employment market, it is not always easy for poor people with few skills to find regular employment. The issue of providing employment for growing populations, both urban and rural, is a vexing economic problem that has been addressed in many different contexts, for example Senegal's Poverty Reduction Strategy (Republic of Senegal 2006). It is however, beyond the

scope of this working paper. Second is the issue of providing adequate housing and necessary services for this growing population. Housing needs to be linked to increasing access to potable water, sanitation, and social infrastructure such as schools and medical facilities. This paper takes as a given the necessity of employment generation and concentrates on the issue of providing housing and services, of creating a livable city, for the residents of Dakar, who are already finding a way, by one means or another, to make a living.

The Senegalese government has said that it would like to create an urban environment that involves the poor as well as the wealthy. It desires to meet the needs of the poor. For example, urban planning is considered to be an essential instrument in the fight against impoverishment. Moreover, many Senegalese have furnished enormous efforts to make their cities more livable for more people. However, it is very expensive to meet all these challenges and the available resources appear to be insufficient, at least over the short term.

### **Key Problems Facing Dakar**

The city of Dakar faces substantial challenges in being able to provide housing and adequate urban services for its growing population. This section deals with four that appear to be the most important. First, the city faces a number of environmental hazards, some quite obvious, others less so. Some of the problems as well as some of the solutions may provoke the displacement of people who live in risk-prone and hazardous areas. Second, finding secure housing with essential services (e.g., water and sanitation) is difficult, because there is simply not enough; therefore many people find themselves living in some degree of housing poverty. Third, Dakar has made substantive efforts to create forward looking plans that take into account the needs and desires of all major groups. However attempts at participatory planning are not always

easy to reconcile with grand strategies proposed by important economic and political actors. Fourth, many Senegalese ask whether it is possible to create in this globalizing world a city that remains deeply Senegalese, that is, a city that responds to the expressed needs of the Senegalese people.

### **Dakar's Environmental Challenges**

The environmental issue most obvious to the Senegalese is oriented around water – in many different forms. First, there is the obvious problem of providing potable drinking water and sanitation to the growing city. Dakar gets its drinking water from a combination of underground water sources, some of which come from some distance, and water pumped from the Guiers lake 250 kilometers away. There is some concern that continued exploitation of the underground water table will lead to its salination, while attempts to put in complementary long-distance provisioning have not been successful so far. Thus, the needs for drinking water in Dakar, although more or less met, will be difficult to sustain, and the demands of a growing population are likely to render even more problematic the access to clean drinking water (Groupement CAUS-BCEOM 2007).<sup>1</sup> In terms of liquid waste, although some parts of the metropolitan region are connected to sewage systems and there are plans to enhance this network, a significant amount of liquid waste continues to be dumped into the ocean (Groupement CAUS-BCEOM 2007). The issue of providing water to particular neighborhoods or individual consumers will be dealt with in the following section on access to essential services. Nevertheless, it is clear that, at the level of the city, the problem of providing clean water and evacuating liquid wastes is a significant challenge.

Another very visible problem linked to water is the drainage of streams swollen by

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rainwater. In general, the West African savanna has a monsoonal rain regime similar to that of much of India, including Mumbai. Even though the amount of rainfall is lower overall than in Indian cities like Mumbai, large storms during the rainy season often bring significant amounts of water. These inevitably cause flooding, especially in the poorer neighborhoods.

Some of the peripheral suburban regions contain large ponds of standing water, known in the local Wolof language as *niayes*. These low-lying areas were used for cultivation during the initial growth of the city, but they dried up and were settled by many people during the Sahelian drought of the 1970s and 1980s. In recent years, the rains have increased and now roads, houses, and courtyard interiors fill with water. Consequently, many projects have been started to address the situation of people who have settled within *niayes*. However, the drainage issue goes beyond this. Other areas of Dakar suffer from rising waters every rainy season; roads and sometimes houses flood. Many of the drainage canals built to evacuate rainwater are old, and the charge they must bear has increased because of the density of construction and the lack of urban green space.

Air pollution is also a serious problem in Dakar; one interviewee remarked that one of his own relatives had died of asthma. It is dangerous to be asthmatic and live in Dakar, he said. In many cities of the West African savanna, urban residents still use wood and charcoal for cooking, which adds to problems of air pollution. However, this has become less of a problem in Dakar, as its residents have begun to use cooking gas; an estimated 87.2% of Dakar households now use gas as their primary source of cooking fuel (DPS 2004:50). Some of Dakar's pollution comes from industry, but one of the prime causes is old and poorly maintained vehicles.

Linked to the problem of pollution is the problem of access to energy. Senegal imports virtually all its petroleum resources since it has no known reserves and no production. Thus,

apart from pollution, the cost of petroleum-based transport contributes to international resource depletion as well as costing residents money. During commuter rush hours, the roads are packed, traffic is slow, and air pollution increases. There is a single train line that leads from the city to the interior, but to the best of my knowledge this has not been used substantially to move commuters into and out of the city. Instead, most of the population makes use of a network of large public buses (*Dakar Dem Dikk*) and smaller, privately owned, mini-buses. A recent development project has been working with mini-bus owners to replace old, polluting, and unsafe buses with newer models, but more needs to be done. A growing city needs a well developed system of transport to allow inhabitants of peripheral neighborhoods to get to work, to bring in products from peripheral markets, and to allow consumers to benefit from lower prices.

Many different strategies can be used to reduce the time that people spend in public transport. Insofar as these strategies reduce the cost of transport, the public will support them because they see a clear benefit. At the same time, making transport more energy efficient will have a positive impact on air pollution and energy resource use. The region of Dakar is already looking at ways to decentralize production spaces through the development of new structure on the periphery (see below). It could however do more to make existing transport more energy efficient. It might be useful to look at the strategies followed by Indian governments to encourage the use of CNG (compressed natural gas) in public transport, which has reduced fuel costs as well as environmental pollution.

Good urban planning requires taking into account the effects of population settlement upon the environment. Today's standards include norms for water and air quality. Moreover many regions need to carry out various efforts for watershed protection and to protect against flooding. An issue that Dakar will face in the future, raised by few if any people, are the potential

effects of rising sea levels brought about by global warming. Given Dakar's location on a peninsula, this will almost surely pose future problems.

The efforts by growing cities to prevent people from living in ecologically fragile areas such as watersheds and the *niayes* and to build roads, transport systems, and water and sanitation systems all demand the use of space, sometimes space where people already live. Therefore, these efforts to regenerate the physical environment essential to improve the quality of urban life often require the displacement of residents, who suffer in their turn.

### **Furnishing Housing and Essential Services**

Despite the efforts that Dakar has made to provide livable neighborhoods and housing for the majority of its residents, the demand for housing remains far larger than its supply. In the 1990s, many newspaper articles discussed problems posed by rising rents; newspaper articles and residents in 2008 talked about the same problem. Others pointed to irregularities in the real estate market. Although there are numerous estate agencies in the city, many units for sale or rent do not enter the formal system. Instead, young people, usually young men, serve as intermediaries between those with housing to sell or rent and those who need lodging. The newspapers raise the question: is this a means to extract money from prospective tenants and buyers or is it a good opportunity for youth self-employment? Still, not all are able to find affordable housing. Spontaneous neighborhoods have grown up to meet the demand, some in the central city and many more on the urban periphery.

#### **1) Housing**

For many Senegalese, owning their own home is a priority. Most urban residents continue to desire a family house on its own plot of land. Because of land shortages in Dakar,

many who live in more central areas of the city now live in apartment buildings, but the idea of a family-owned dwelling on its own plot of land remains an orienting value for many. Particularly in the periphery, people still believe that the first step in getting access to housing is getting a plot of land, upon which they will then build their own house as they have the financial means to do so. Therefore, the first step in getting housing is getting land.

The formal deeded registration of land in the name of an individual owner is the most secure form of tenure, but this would appear to be rare in the city of Dakar. During my interviews, several people cited the same figure: only 3% of the land in the region of Dakar is properly registered and deeded. This is a figure that is almost impossible to check, but it does not mean that 97% of the population of the city lives in continual fear of expropriation. In many areas of the city, particularly in the older, more central neighborhoods and newer more affluent ones, residents are quite secure.

Nevertheless, the tenure laws are indeed complex. They would appear to be based upon initial customary claims by a number of indigenous groups, upon which French colonial law put its imprint, and then contemporary Senegalese law made changes. A number of fishing groups lived in the area of Dakar when the French arrived and they still lay claims, of moral ownership at least, to significant areas of the existing city. The Lébou, for example, claim large areas south of the Dakar airport, an area now densely settled with mostly affluent residents. Representatives of the Lébou leadership regularly attend major meetings of the area and refer to the land as theirs. They interact with existing residents and elected municipal governments in a variety of ways. This is only one example of the layers of claims to the land in Dakar. Nevertheless, many people are able to get relatively secure access to land and housing, despite not having formal titles or deeds. However, many, especially the poor, are subject to great housing insecurity.

The idea that the city ought to provide housing for residents of varying economic means was much in the minds of Senegalese planners at independence in 1960. Early governments invested in housing developments. The SICAP program built 11,000 housing units between 1960 and 1980, most of which went to employed civil servants; The HLM program built approximately 8,000 units, mostly in multi-story apartment buildings; these went primarily to people of more moderate incomes, but still middle-class. Thus the middle class became a primary beneficiary of urban planning (Antoine and Mboup 1994:287). The government also encouraged the movement of laborers to the periphery, notably to the neighborhoods of Pikine and Guediawaye. Initially planned, these neighborhoods have now outgrown their first sites and include their own spontaneously settled peripheries.

Senegal's efforts to provide government-sponsored housing were affected by structural adjustment in the 1980s, which included pressure to create a free-market approach to urban housing. Now new housing construction proceeds more on the basis of public-private partnerships or purely private development. For example, a large parcel of land may be allocated to a land development company, which is in charge of the entire process of neighborhood planning, from bringing in services to individual lot creation and sometimes housing construction. Depending on the project, the company then sells improved lots, houses, or apartments to clients. There are few formal studies of these projects, including the clientele they serve, the quality of services or housing, or the extent to which they follow standard municipal planning and construction standards.

There is however anecdotal evidence that at least some of these developments leave much to be desired. Some have even argued that developers have created "shantytowns for the rich." Several interviewees spoke of one new neighborhood called Marist, in an old industrial

area on the northeast of the peninsula. This is a development with many apartment buildings, aimed primarily toward the middle and upper-middle class. Thus, the individual units appear to be of acceptable quality and people have sufficiently secure tenure. What makes this a shantytown is the lack of formal site planning for the community and lack of public services. Several people claimed that the road layout was so confusing that people often got lost while trying to find a particular building. This neighborhood also lacks much standard public infrastructure, such as schools or community areas. These experiences suggest that although more affluent areas do not suffer the same level of tenure insecurity as do poorer areas, poorly planned residential construction without sufficient attention to public services can affect people at all levels of the socio-economic spectrum.

The problems are obviously more acute for the poor. Some poor live in classic shantytowns inside the city. In these zones, residents build shelters from whatever materials are available, creating what the Senegalese refer to as *baraques* (barracks). These non-registered zones are not on the planning maps and rarely have basic services, including public water taps, schools, health centers, etc. However, since they are within the city, surrounded by regularized neighborhoods, people do have access to some facilities. Much more populous are spontaneous neighborhoods on the city's periphery. Here, if people feel secure, the houses they build may be more permanent. Yet, as more residents arrive, these areas often become dense agglomerations; houses are built very close to one another, with only paths between them; vehicles cannot enter. These neighborhoods not only suffer from lack of access to standard public services, but they also face lack of access to public transport and markets.

In a desire to create a functioning and healthy city, Senegalese authorities carried out large-scale evictions in the 1970s, with the goal of starting new neighborhoods from scratch. As

has been the case almost everywhere, this caused considerable backlash and resistance among the affected, and the government has since renounced mass demolitions. Now the Senegalese government has committed itself to a strategy of restructuration and regularization of spontaneous popular neighborhoods. This is considered to be an integral part of its larger fight against poverty and efforts to achieve Millennium Development Goals. In a restructured shantytown, the area will be surveyed and censused, a water system will be put into place, and roads and housing plots will be laid out. The new plots will be officially allocated to residents, preferably to the family already on the plot; the owner then is responsible for providing housing, usually with some form of subsidy. Because existing restructuration plans, mostly carried out in peripheral neighborhoods, are oriented around single-family plots at relatively low density, some percentage of existing residents will not be able to remain in the re-structured neighborhood. Those who must move are resettled in newly established zones, with equivalent benefits, but further out in the periphery, because this is the only place to find sufficient large tracts of land.

Although the government's goal is to restructure a large number of spontaneous neighborhoods, this process has so far touched only a minority of them. Moreover, there is little information on the proportions of people who are able to remain or the number of people who are required to move. There is also little information about the experiences of people in the new resettlement areas, the services available to them, or the quality of their lives there.

Many Senegalese involved in this effort believe that regularization in and of itself will permit people to invest in their houses and neighborhoods. The underlying assumption is that insofar as people have secure tenure, they will build houses more in line with construction norms. Insofar as they improve their physical quality of life, their standard of living will also improve. The new roads that accompany regularization will allow the growth of markets and

increased access to public transport. Interviewees gave several examples to support this theory. However, resettlement studies problematize that idea that secure land tenure in and itself is sufficient to reduce poverty for all (Koenig In Press; TISS 2008). In many places, urban renewal, including that which seeks to regularize land tenure inside spontaneous neighborhoods, often involves at least some resettlement of concerned groups into more peripheral neighborhoods. These resettlement zones are quite far from the city, and access to both employment and public transport is likely to be problematic. People may find themselves with good housing but without the means to keep it up. Senegalese claim a more positive outcome, but lack systematic data to illustrate it. Therefore, this remains a hypothesis that needs more research.

## 2) Essential Services

New neighborhoods are not just about housing, but also about the access to essential public services and infrastructure that make urban life healthy and sustainable. A previous section of this paper noted the challenges to metropolitan Dakar in providing basic resources throughout the urban region. Neighborhood creation and rehabilitation projects promise improved services, but these do not always arrive expeditiously.

Water and sanitation are basic public services that are an integral part of the creation of new neighborhoods. People very much want potable water and they often are willing to pay for it. As roads are being brought in, it is relatively easy to bring in the necessary network to provide water to new and regularized neighborhoods. Moreover, Dakar's major water company (SDE/SONES) has put into place a subsidized rate for the poor (179 FCFA [16.9 Indian rupees]/m<sup>3</sup> for the subsidized rate vs. 513 FCFA [48.4 Indian rupees]/m<sup>3</sup> for other consumers).<sup>1</sup> It has also constructed public wells in popular neighborhoods. With these efforts, Senegal has almost

attained the Millennium Development Goal of universal access to potable water. Nevertheless the price of water remains a problem. In neighborhoods not yet on the main water network, poorer residents do not yet have access to a water connection at the subsidized price. In this case, they must use public water sources; this water is not free, but is paid for by the container. Its price is often higher than the standard water connection rate.

Despite the problems, the provision of potable water is a great success compared to the problem of getting rid of solid and liquid wastes. Both of these have met more challenges, but they are obviously of crucial importance to a healthy city. As noted above, the sewerage system in Dakar is grossly insufficient, and because of this, restructured neighborhoods do not always include sanitation systems, even though they are considered essential. Moreover, residents do not show the same willingness to pay for sewerage systems as they have for providing potable water. Several non-governmental organizations have begun working with neighborhoods to implement innovative methodologies to control liquid and solid wastes, but these strategies are not used everywhere. Solid waste disposal also remains a problem. Thus, the problem of pollution of water and air due to the lack of treatment of liquid wastes and burning of solid waste remains important.

Whether the government has the necessary resources to bring other services such as education, health, and public transport to new and regularized neighborhoods is also problematic. In contrast to basic physical infrastructure, such as roads, water, and sewerage, lack of government action in regard to services can be compensated to some extent by private providers. However, these come at a cost not always easily met by the urban poor. In the case of the “shantytowns of the rich,” however, private clinics or schools may replace the government institutions that are not provided.

Private services are less constrained by bureaucratic norms and depend on private financing rather than taxes and project resources; people move into these services when they believe that they can make a profit. The case of so-called public transport is a key example that illustrates the different constraints faced by the public and private sector. In many cities in the world, public transport is truly public, that is, planned, regulated, and financed by a public institution, such as a municipality. If private transport exists, it exists in parallel and may operate at least semi-clandestinely. In contrast, in many West African cities, including Dakar, the public sector is complemented by a private sector, regulated, but not financed, by government. As noted, a government planned and financed commuter bus company (*Dakar Dem Dikk*) exists, but along side it, many private mini-buses carry commuters throughout the city. This private form of public transport can move quickly into new neighborhoods, when the population increases to a point at which bus owners believe that they can make money. To make a profit, a bus owner must cover vehicle costs, maintenance, insurance, permits, and driver and assistant salary. Nevertheless, if owners charge fares that are too high, they will not have enough clients. Although municipalities work with transport and driver unions to plot route lines and determine fares, this privately financed public transport system has often been criticized for its anarchy and lack of attention to safety standards (Godard 2005:30-32); in fact, the World Bank funded a project to “rationalize” public transport in Dakar. However, this system appears responsive to the needs of new neighborhoods, since it can quickly enlarge the public transport system by bringing collective transport to outlying neighborhoods.

Private clinics, pharmacies, and schools also move into new neighborhoods when they perceive sufficient clientele. Much more research is needed on how these private services work, who can pay for them, and their level of quality. It appears for example, that private elementary

schools in West Africa include both very good schools, which serve the elite, but also relatively poor schools that focus on the income of the owners rather than the quality of education of the students. Some of these can have very poor pass rates on national standardized examinations.

Within India, many organizations are working to encourage national and state governments to live up to their responsibilities to the poor. They do this in the belief that there are sufficient resources to spread the benefits of the Indian economic boom more widely. In West African savanna societies such as Senegal, the resources available to the government have increased in recent years, but they are still much lower than those available to the growing countries of Asia. Arguably, Africa has no choice but to explore public-private partnerships as a way to provide essential services in urban neighborhoods, but it is necessary to understand the constraints in order to make them more widely available at affordable costs.

### **Planning Procedures**

The French-speaking Sahelian countries have mostly developed relatively centralized forms of public administration, somewhat modeled after France. This is a contrast to the more decentralized traditions found in countries with English-speaking traditions. This centralizing tendency is compatible with the relatively small populations of these countries. Thus, West African government action starts from a context more top-down and directed from the center than has been the case in India, whose large states have a substantial amount of independence.

Nevertheless, Senegal has a more decentralized tradition than many of its neighbors. It can point to elected governments in urban jurisdictions (*communes*) since the 1920s; at independence some 10 urban communes had local governments. After independence, Senegal committed itself to progressive decentralization, with a certain amount of re-organization of the

municipal government in the Dakar region, as it grew. In 1996, even more responsibility was evolved onto urban communes; this included responsibility for urban planning and land development. Nevertheless, the National Assembly dissolved municipal councils in December 2001 and replaced them with central administration appointees for a short period, until June 2002. Since that time, municipalities have moved toward greater control over their own resources and futures (Groupement CAUS-BCEOM 2007).

Although Senegal's urban communes have a tradition of local government, they have been able to profit from the recent interest in decentralization by donors to the Sahelian region. Like countries with little history of administrative decentralization (for example, Senegal's neighbor Mali), the country has been able to get new resources to support communal governments. For example, the *Agence de Développement Municipal* (ADM, Agency for Municipal Development) has received substantial funding from the World Bank to enable collectivities to build needed new infrastructure, such as roads, markets, mayors' offices, and municipal facilities.

Moreover, the Senegalese government has made a commitment to participatory planning. Municipalities adopt participatory strategies in urban planning, in part, to avoid problems created by classic planning, considered to be too top-down and technocratic. They believe that classic planning has not taken sufficiently into account the expressed needs of the urban population. NGOs have also put pressure on the government to use more participatory strategies, and they carry out their own participatory urban projects with alternative funding. A new regional planning effort known as the Grand Dakar Project has made extensive efforts to be participatory, and smaller organizations also have adopted participatory frameworks. For example, the foundation *Droit à la Ville* (Right to the City) has undertaken participatory planning in areas

where it has done restructuration projects.

However, alongside these commitments to participation exist grand schemes put forward by prominent political actors. Much significant new infrastructure was under discussion and some of it is already underway. There is a plan to move the administrative capital to a new or existing city somewhat inland from the present site of Dakar; Dakar would remain as an economic capital/center. To complement this new capital, there would be a new airport, somewhere between old Dakar and the new administrative center. Dubai Ports World has recently taken over management of the existing Dakar port, and the government is negotiating with them to create a new port on the mainland side of the bay. Near this would be a new Special Economic Zone, which could profit from proximity to the port. Joining it all together is a new toll road that leads inland toward the area that will host the new infrastructure and capital (Figure 2). These grand schemes may be oriented around the development of the city of Dakar and the nation of Senegal, but they do not appear to be the outcome of participatory procedures that have involved all sectors and levels of the population. Even if it is desired, it is not clear how participatory regional planning may be implemented at this level. To what extent is it possible to integrate participatory planning with larger regional planning procedures to meet the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century growth?

Planning, participatory or otherwise, is also made more difficult by the complex nature of municipal government. Individual communes make a variety of decisions, but they are now linked together in large units, including the agglomeration of Dakar. In effect, the Grand Dakar planning process is for the entire agglomeration; 53 different collectivities of quite varied sizes are trying to work together to create a coherent regional plan. These include 19 arrondissement communes in Dakar proper, 16 in Pikine, 5 in Guediawaye, 3 in Rufisque, plus 3 additional

communes and 2 rural communities.<sup>ii</sup> These collectivities have different kinds of populations, different interests, and different visions of the future of region. To be sure, many important interventions take place at the level of the commune, the arrondissement commune, or the community. However, large infrastructure investments like the toll road, or even the coordination of bus routes or solid waste disposal, require coordination among many different collectivities. With large projects, lack of coordination can lead to chaos. What strategies can be used to encourage systematic coordination and facilitate the consistent participation of all communes?

The integration of grand ideas with participatory strategies and the involvement of a large number of diverse collectivities are not the only barriers to good planning. More mundane factors cause problems as well. As in many places, municipal or national laws, created at different times and in different contexts, contradict one another; they are also often complex and confusing. Of particular note in the context of this paper, Senegalese land laws and procedures are so complex that the people I interviewed, all well-educated professionals, disagreed on the content of some legal provisions. In the larger project, I was interested in knowing about provisions for people displaced by development projects, such as the toll road. Those interviewees who worked in projects financed by the World Bank noted that they were required to follow World Bank Resettlement Policy by offering compensation to all residents, even those who were not formal land owners (i.e., those who did not have registered and deeded lands). They claimed that World Bank procedures were contrary to Senegalese law, which had no provision for compensation for those they considered “squatters.” However, the government agreed to pay compensation to all displaced within World Bank project zones in order to receive project funding. In contrast, NGO personnel who worked on restructuring projects pointed to a law that gave benefits even to those without secure tenure in the neighborhoods concerned (the

vast majority of the population). These projects provided new lots and credit to build new housing to all concerned residents, irrespective of the previous tenure situation. It appears that these two sets of interventions make references to different laws and procedures.

Finally, some have suggested that attention to participatory procedures can easily lead to ad hoc negotiated solutions to particular problems, which can in turn lead to anarchy. The decentralization process itself provides an illustration. As noted, a World Bank project has provided funds to allow decentralized collectivities to undertake infrastructure development activities. Decentralization has also introduced a new aspect to participation, the pressure put upon elected officials by their constituencies. For example, if elected officials plan infrastructure that displaces too many people, especially among their constituents, they may lose the next election. In this light, one of the advisors on the ADM project has encouraged mayors and municipal councils to try to avoid resettlement and to try to find solutions to development issues that simultaneously please the people and their elected officials. This has sometimes led to solutions that do not conform to existing planning norms. For example, instead of constructing a wide road that would displace many people, one municipality decided to construct two narrower roads several blocks distant from one another, each a one-way street; in this way, they displaced fewer people. This solution pleased the concerned population as well as the local administration, but did not please planners, who argued that this solution did not respect highway construction standards. On the one hand, following standards simply in order to do so, without attention to the felt needs of the population, risks letting bureaucratic needs trump human ones. On the other hand, the multiplication of numerous solutions without regard to standards can bring about chaos, which itself poses problems to urban residents. The problem is to find solutions that respond at one and the same time to the socio-cultural needs of the population and to

fundamental standards for the siting and construction of infrastructure. This can be done, but it is not always obvious or easy.

A commitment to participatory planning is not sufficient in itself to guarantee that the needs of the majority of the urban poor will be taken into account when planning for the future of a large metropolitan area. This is something that Indian development authorities have known for some time, but it is a relatively new challenge for West African urban governments.

### **Socio-cultural Issues**

In what sense are Senegalese cities, especially Dakar, Senegalese? Interviewees often said that cities introduced a way of life unknown before colonization; the first four communes of Senegal were all created by the colonizers. Because these four urban communes were a part of the French nation, the inhabitants had the right to become citizens of France and the impact of French ideas and French civilization were more marked here than in the colony's interior. Resident Europeans were more likely to live in these cities as well. These cities, especially Dakar, were indeed influenced by colonization.

Nevertheless, the city of Dakar has changed a lot since independence in 1960. On the one hand, city planning in Dakar appears to have been influenced by what are now international norms for urban planning. If some of these norms were initially based on the experience of growing European cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the last 40 years, cities in developing countries, especially in Asia, have become models for urban life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Insofar as Senegalese planners have relationships with their colleagues in other countries of the global South, these planners can develop standards of planning that respond more to the needs of their populations.

They can effectively create cities adapted to the conditions of the global South.

But what does it mean to create an urban life adapted to Senegalese culture? What, in fact, does the concept of Senegalese culture mean in a country composed of many different ethnic groups (e.g., Wolof, Serer, Fulbe, etc.)? If there is a Senegalese culture that implicates all these different groups, of what does it consist? These are not only empirical questions, but also philosophical and political ones, far beyond the scope of this short paper. Moreover, it is primarily the Senegalese themselves who will answer these questions. However, many Senegalese stated that living in cities was not in and of itself a staple element of Senegalese culture; they see themselves as essentially rural people who find themselves living in cities because economies and societies have changed. Two specific aspects of urban living were consistently raised during my interviews.

First, many people questioned whether apartment buildings could ever truly be part of their culture, whether they could ever feel truly comfortable living in them. They made two different points in regard to this. In these apartments, there is insufficient outdoor space to allow people to pursue activities that they would normally pursue in the open air. When people have outdoor areas, they will wash clothes and often cook in them. A large amount of socializing is also done outside rather than inside buildings. Second, these apartments do not always accommodate the large families of urban Senegalese. In 2004, the average household size in Dakar was 8.2 persons (DPS 2004:38); those planning urban resettlement projects in 2008 were using an average of 10 people/household to calculate estimates of numbers to be displaced (e.g., 6000 households equals 60,000 inhabitants). These households contain not only nuclear families, but are usually extended households that lodge additional relatives for varying periods of time. In fact, family sizes may change rapidly as relatives move in or move out. To be sure, the size of

any durable housing unit, apartment or single family, cannot be quickly made smaller or larger, but the outdoor space offered by a large garden makes it easier for a household to absorb newcomers. Senegalese do not believe that apartments offer the same ability to adapt housing to rapid change in family size as relatives are added or leave.

Nonetheless, as noted, much new construction is in the form of multi-story apartment residences; some new neighborhoods, even at some distance from downtown, are almost exclusively composed of apartment buildings. These buildings allow people to live closer to their work places, which is important in light of the rising cost of fuel and transport. Not only do people spend less for transport, but travel time is often shorter. In fact, city life depends upon a certain density of interaction; otherwise the result is a kind of overgrown village, which extends over kilometers and creates pollution because of long commutes. The Senegalese themselves will need to conceptualize ways in which they can make apartment living more Senegalese, but planners should also think about allocating larger interior spaces to families living in apartments than they might to equivalent single-family dwellings. In the city, people need more interior space in which to carry out the varied activities they pursue.

This is not a unique problem. It is indeed faced by many cities of the global South: how to lodge families in healthy conditions, respectful of their rights as well as accommodating to their society and culture. For example, according to several Mumbai interviewees, Muslim households in the Mumbai Urban Transport resettlement apartments faced particular problems finding the privacy for joint families that they expected. Some planners have looked for solutions adapted to their specific situation. For example, the Pakistani architect, Yasmine Lari, looked for strategies to restructure a Karachi shantytown that would create density and protect people's privacy but avoid multi-story apartment buildings (Lari 1982). Trying to find new ways of urban

living that take into account local society and culture demands a strong investment in participatory planning to know which aspects of a culture people themselves deem most important. One cannot simply leave planning to a building company that relies on standard schemes.

The second question concerns the role of rental housing as opposed to house ownership. Most Senegalese claimed an explicit goal of owning their own home. In contrast, at a seminar in Dakar, a UN representative argued that a national policy built on the idea that every Senegalese can own his or her own home is simply not realistic. He argued that it is more important to develop rental housing policies to address the needs of the poorest and allow them to live in better conditions. From his perspective, finding the necessary funds to buy or even build a house or apartment would seem to be impossible for many of the very poor. Therefore, it is crucial to put into place a rental policy that includes encouragement to the private sector, including individual investors, to invest in small-scale rental housing. It is no longer realistic, he argued, to expect that governments can provide subsidized rental housing for all who need it. However, the government can act in partnership with the private sector to increase access to rental housing. This has not been the case so far in Senegal, which he argued, has not had an effective policy in regard to rental housing.

But Senegalese themselves argue that living one's life in rental housing is not part of the culture of any Senegalese group. Moreover, the empirical evidence suggests that many Senegalese, even those who appear poor, are ready to invest in housing when they have secure tenure. The extended family often provides assistance when one member of the family has the opportunity to get a house. Several interviewees remarked that you could see this in the regularized shantytowns. People lived in shacks as long as they feared that they might be

bulldozed, but when they had a securely owned lot, money appeared and they were able to build more durable housing.

What indeed is the reality here? The evidence in regard to Senegal is mostly anecdotal, and my previous research suggests that there is some truth in the propositions of both sides. It is true that lack of secure tenure is one of the principal barriers to building durable housing as well as creating a sense of belonging in the city. Once land security is achieved, many indeed will build better housing. Housing activists in Mumbai also stressed the role of tenure insecurity in deciding what to build; as long as people were concerned about destruction of their slums, they built minimal housing with easily available materials, but as they felt more secure, they would strengthen and enlarge their houses, sometimes even adding stories.

Yet, people who build their own housing often take a long time, building a single room at a time, because they cannot afford to complete construction any faster. Interviewees from restructuring projects in Dakar also noted that some of the people sold their new lots in order to get a lump sum to allow a child to attempt (often illegal) foreign migration. Others might use money from lot sales to marry a second wife. Some simply became land speculators. Many who sold the lots moved on to a new shantytown in an even more peripheral neighborhood. These examples suggest that tenure security is not sufficient to create sustainable communities for the urban poor.

As discussed above, sustainable housing is more than buildings but involves communities that offer a range of services and allow individuals and families to create social networks and a sense of belonging. Therefore, more is needed than just providing individual lots upon which the poor can build. By definition, the poor usually have less economic and financial capital. In addition, they often have less social capital (diverse and rich social networks) and less cultural

capital (the intimate knowledge of how the urban agglomeration as a whole works), which makes it more of a challenge for them to create livable communities. It is not clear that rental housing is the answer to this problem, but it is not clear that providing lots to all Senegalese will allow them to create viable urban communities either. This is a question that deserves more research.

### **Conclusion: Outstanding Questions**

Although both Senegalese and international researchers have undertaken significant research on Senegalese cities, many outstanding questions remain. The following questions appear to be among the most important for the future.

1) It is essential to carry out systematic studies of the futures of the communities affected by development projects as well as by projects to restructure shantytowns to better understand exactly how people's lives have been improved and how they have not. Is there in fact sufficient employment in new neighborhoods? If so, what were the conditions that led to this positive result in Dakar, in contrast to many other cities of the world? How can one reproduce these conditions in other places? If not, what are the complementary steps that need to be taken to get better results? Have services, both public (such as water and road networks) and private (such as markets and collective transport), arrived in these new neighborhoods as expected? If so, what are the conditions that have facilitated the arrival of public services (such as schools or health services)? What conditions facilitate the arrival of private services, such as transport and stores? If services have not arrived as expected, what are the complementary steps needed to get better results?

2) What is the impact of decentralization on planning procedures and the generation of

urban employment? What is its impact on new urban development projects, including those that displace people? Has the number of projects that led to displacement increased or decreased with government decentralization? Have these new strategies led to better or worse living standards for the population?

3) What has been the impact of the attempts at participatory planning? What have been the actual modalities of participation? Are there groups that remain outside of the planning process, despite the stated wish to involve all the affected? What has been the contribution of experts? What is the relationship between the standards of the experts and the wishes of the involved populations? Do flexibility and negotiation lead to better results for urban populations, especially the urban poor? What happens when a population chooses to pursue a strategy that takes them outside of “normal professional standards”? When collectivities follow different development strategies, is there a means for them to share results with each other, so that the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches and strategies can be systematically compared?

4) How do Dakar residents adapt socio-culturally to a life that is more dense? How do they adapt to lives in multi-story apartment buildings? Do they use these buildings in innovative ways not foreseen by the construction companies? Are there changes that could be made in construction that will render these housing options more accommodating to people’s needs? To what extent does having secure tenure in and of itself allow people to build sustainable housing and communities? What categories of people need more substantial help and what should be included in it? What role could an enhanced rental policy play in creating better housing and communities for the urban poor?

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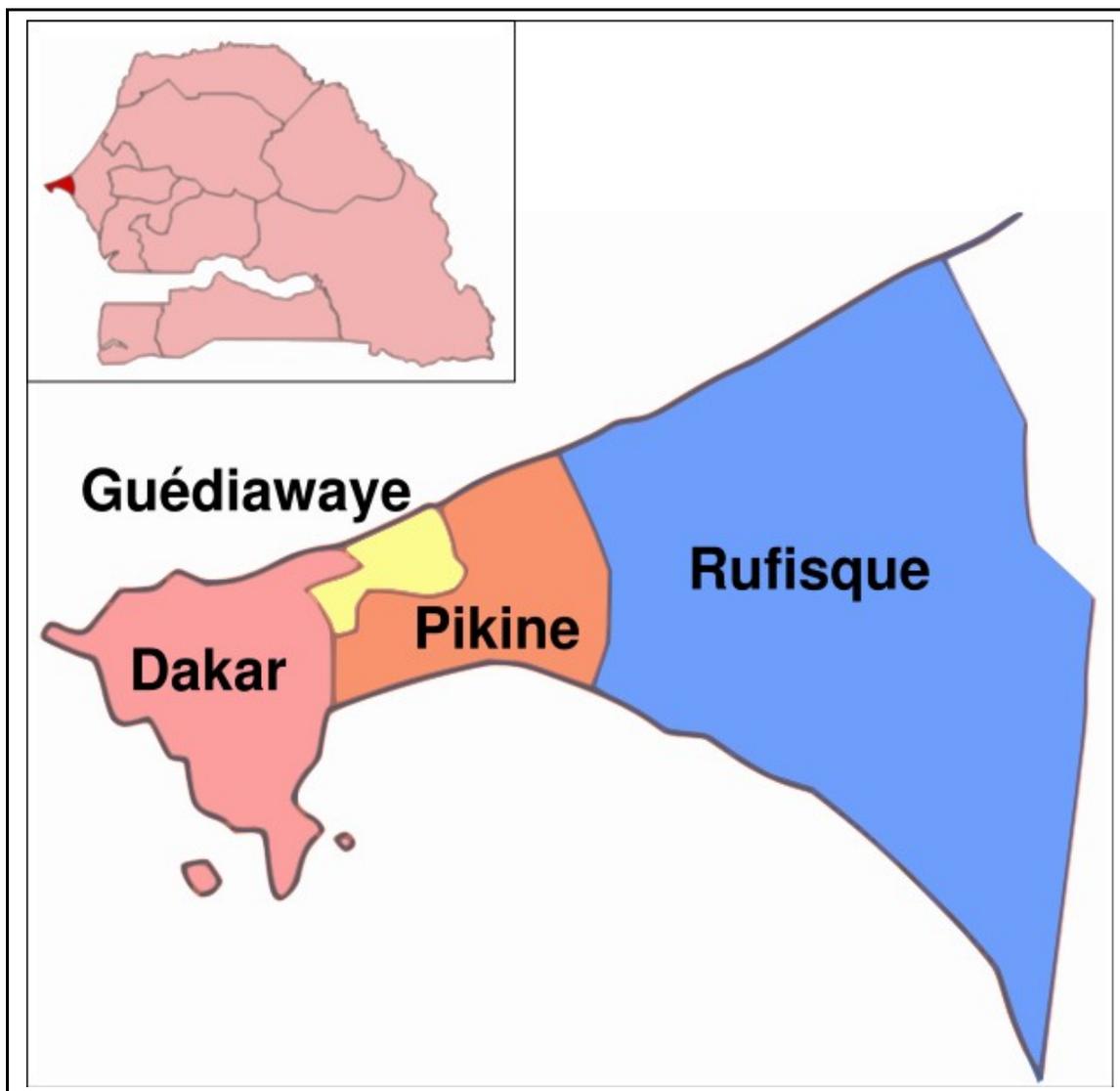
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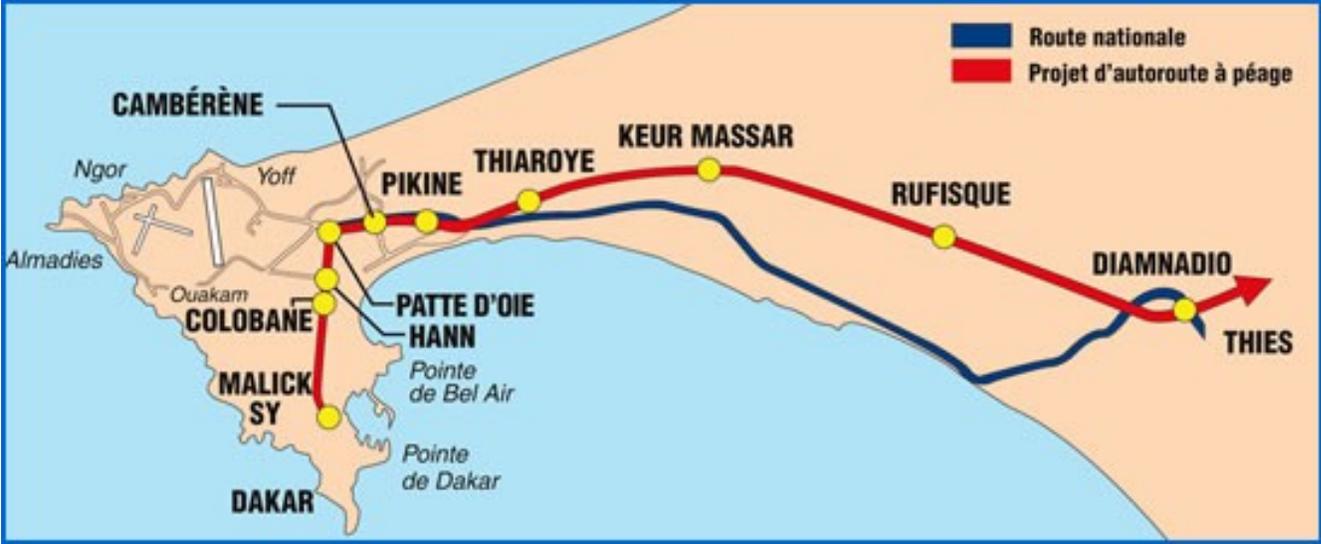
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**Figure 1. Map of Senegal:**  
Dakar and Neighboring Communes of Guédiawaye, Pikine, and Rufisque



Source: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakar\\_Region](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakar_Region)

Figure 2: Proposed Route of the Dakar to Diamnadio Toll road



Source: “L’Autoroute à Péage: Un Accélérateur de Croissance.” *Le Soleil Investissement & Enterprise*, No. 2, March 2006. P. 8.

End Notes

<sup>i</sup> The CFA franc (FCFA) is the shared currency of the West African Financial Community, an organization of French speaking West African States. Its value is tied to the Euro. In mid-February 2009, 1 Indian rupee equaled 10.6 FCFA.

<sup>ii</sup>

According to Senegalese terminology, urban jurisdictions are referred to as communes and rural jurisdictions are called communities. Moreover, some large urban communes, such as those found in Dakar and its agglomération, are further divided into smaller units called arrondissement communes.

The problem is even more complicated. The figures suggest that insofar as people get more reliable clean water supplies, their water usage goes up. While average water consumption is 15 liters/person/day for those who are not connected to the water system, this increases to 40 liters/person/day for those who are connected to the system, but lack a flush toilet. In Dakar's planned neighborhoods, the consumption increases to 80 liters/person/day (Groupement CAUS-BCEOM 2007: 108,109).