



ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA



THE FIGHT FOR LAND, LIVELIHOODS, AND JUSTICE IN RUFISQUE

In the Dakar region of Senegal, where rapid urban expansion increasingly encroaches on natural spaces, the lush, fertile lands of Lendeng have become a battleground. For decades, this 56-hectare market gardening zone in Rufisque has provided not only a vital source of food security but also a way of life for hundreds of farming families. Today, however, these fields are under siege. Private investors, eyeing the land's economic potential, have pushed local market gardeners into a struggle for survival. This is the story of how a determined community has mobilized to defend their land, their livelihoods, and their right to continue the agro-ecological practices that sustain them.

LENDENG

A Green Lung at Risk

Situated at the crossroads of major industrial developments—bordered by the toll motorway, SOCOCIM cement factory, and several large industries—the Lendeng market gardening zone is more than just farmland. The area serves as a "green lung" amidst the industrial sprawl of Rufisque. Farmers in Lendeng have cultivated vegetables for generations, with tomatoes, onions, cabbage, and other crops playing a key role in supplying local markets in Dakar and ensuring the food security of the surrounding population.

The socio-economic importance of this area cannot be understated. The Lendeng fields directly employ 185 farmers, creating over 2,000 jobs, with another 1,500 indirectly tied to activities such as local crafts and trade. In economic terms, Lendeng contributes approximately 1.8 billion euros in annual turnover—a remarkable figure for a small area. Yet the value of Lendeng goes far beyond its economic worth. It represents a way of life, a symbol of environmental stewardship, and a cornerstone of local food sovereignty.

LAND GRABBING

The Threat Emerges

In recent years, however, the green fields of Lendeng have become the target of aggressive land speculation. As Senegal continues to urbanize and industrialize, fertile land has become increasingly scarce and valuable. In 2018, President of the Republic, Macky Sall had declared Lendeng a no-build zone, preserving the area for agricultural use. This decision was supported by a prefectural decree. Despite this, fraudulent practices and lack of enforcement have allowed developers to inch their way into the land, threatening to dismantle the community's agricultural heritage.

One of the most egregious examples came in 2024 when a private investor, Pierre Mboup, acquired a 1,750-square-meter plot in the heart of the Lendeng zone with plans to build a petrol station. This move sparked outrage among the local farmers. According to the president of the Lendeng Market Gardeners' Collective, Pape Konaté, the land grab was more than just a business transaction—it was an existential threat to the community. "The State of Senegal must resolve this nebulous situation at Lendeng," said Konaté. "Some ill-intentioned people have shared the cake with the idea of wiping out this site, which provides an ecological livelihood for the people who have risen up to say no to the disappearance of Lendeng. It's our green lung."

For the people of Lendeng, the stakes could not be higher. Beyond the economic loss, land grabbing threatens the social fabric of the community. The land at Lendeng, which is traditionally managed through a mix of customary practices and modern agriculture, provides families with food, income, and a connection to their heritage. "The Lendeng site remains the 'only green lung' in the department of Rufisque," said Fara Diamé, a local horticultural producer. "Market gardeners on the site use more than 4,000 tonnes of organic waste (manure) as part of their horticultural activities."



THE STRUGGLE BEGINS

The market gardeners, unwilling to watch their land be transformed into a petrol station, began to organize. Community leaders, civil society organizations, and NGOs rallied to the farmers' cause, creating a wave of public protests and demonstrations. In early 2024, nine market gardeners, including one woman, were arrested for protesting against the planned construction of the petrol station. The arrests only strengthened the resolve of the community. CICODEV Africa, a Pan-African institute focused on citizenship, consumer rights, and development, joined forces with other organizations to provide legal, social, and media support to the market gardeners.

The protests garnered widespread attention. Civil society groups such as the Local Development Committee (CODEL) and the Collective for the Defence of Lendeng were instrumental in coordinating demonstrations and keeping the issue in the public eye. At one protest, the local population came out en masse to block the construction site. "We are here today to say no to the petrol station," said market gardener Mouhamed Ndiaye. "Everyone knows that petrol is not suitable for farming. The President issued a circular to protect this area, and that circular is still with us."

The solidarity extended beyond Lendeng's borders. Civil society actors across Senegal, including farmers from other regions facing similar threats, rallied behind the Lendeng cause. As the demonstrations gained momentum, the story of Lendeng became symbolic of the wider land struggles playing out across Senegal, where rural communities are increasingly marginalized in the face of industrial expansion.

WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT

One of the most significant aspects of the Lendeng struggle is the role of women in leading the charge. In Lendeng, women are deeply involved in the vegetable trade, and their livelihoods are directly tied to the preservation of the land. For these women, losing access to the fertile soil of Lendeng would mean not only a loss of income but also a threat to their ability to feed their families and support their communities.



As the conflict with developers escalated, women from the community took on leadership roles in the protests and mobilization efforts. They organized meetings, engaged with the media, and participated in legal actions to defend their rights to the land. Their voices, often sidelined in larger development conversations, became central to the movement to protect Lendeng.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The potential economic impact of losing Lendeng is devastating. If the land is converted into a petrol station and other commercial developments, the community will not only lose its primary source of income but also its connection to the land. Local market gardeners, many of whom have farmed the land for generations, will be forced to find new livelihoods—a daunting prospect in an economy where farming is often the only option.



The environmental consequences are equally severe. Lendeng plays a critical role in regulating local temperatures, acting as a natural buffer against the industrial heat of the surrounding factories. It also functions as a carbon sink, helping to offset the pollution generated by nearby industries. The loss of Lendeng would mean the destruction of this green lung, exacerbating climate change and further degrading the local environment.

"The installation of a petrol station can lead to soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, and depletion of natural species," explained a representative from CICODEV Africa. "The increased use of hydrocarbons and the residues of service station products on vegetable farms can contaminate soils and water sources, affecting the quality of vegetable produce and even the health of local populations."

LEGAL AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES

The legal framework surrounding land rights in Senegal is complex, and it has played a significant role in the Lendeng land dispute. Land in Senegal is governed by a dual system: the national domain system, which covers unregistered urban and rural land, and the registration system, which guarantees land ownership to those with title deeds. Unfortunately, 80% of Lendeng's farmers do not hold formal title deeds, leaving them vulnerable to land grabs by private investors with political connections.



While the government has taken steps to protect agricultural land through initiatives like the non aedificandi decree, enforcement remains a challenge. The lack of transparency in land acquisition processes has only added to the uncertainty, with many farmers feeling left in the dark about their rights and the future of their land. "The legal framework in the sense of the law laid down by the State is not sufficient to understand the legal situation of land in Senegal," said Amadou Kanouté, Executive Director of CICODEV Africa. "Efforts have been made to regulate land acquisition, but many farmers do not have title deeds, making them vulnerable to land grabbing."

THE ROAD AHEAD

The farmers of Lendeng are not just fighting to keep their land—they are fighting for the right to practice agroecology, a system of farming that promotes sustainability, biodiversity, and local food sovereignty. Agroecology offers a powerful alternative to the industrial agricultural model that often prioritizes profit over people and the planet. By declaring Lendeng an agroecological zone, the government could set a powerful precedent for how land should be managed in Senegal, ensuring that local farmers have the tools and resources they need to thrive.

For now, the farmers of Lendeng continue to resist, holding onto the hope that their green lung will not be swallowed up by urban sprawl. Their fight is about more than just land—it is about justice, dignity, and the right to a sustainable future. As local leader Alioune Sow put it, "Certain individuals with dubious intentions have sought to appropriate this land, jeopardizing an essential site that ensures the ecological and economic viability of the region."

The Lendeng story is far from over, but one thing is certain: the community's unwavering commitment to their land will continue to inspire others across Senegal and beyond. As the world grapples with climate change and food insecurity, the struggle for Lendeng serves as a reminder that protecting the land is not just a local issue—it is a global imperative.



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WHO IS AFSA?

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