



# SURRENDERING OUR FUTURE:

## SENHUILE-SENÉTHANOL PLANTATION DESTROYS LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND JEOPARDIZES ENVIRONMENT

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The Oakland Institute

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Front and back cover photos: Open canals that divert water to the Senhuile-Sénéthanol plantation. ©: Davide Cirillo

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A family in Ndiaël that will be forced from their home by the Senhuile-Sénéthanol project. © Ebrimah Sillah

## Overview

Senhuile-Sénéthanol, an agribusiness company, has been setting up agro-industrial plantations in the Saint-Louis region of northwest Senegal since July 2010. Owned by a complex maze of companies and individuals with ties to numerous countries around the world, including Italy, United States, Brazil, and Panama, the company holds a lease for 20,000 hectares of land. From the very inception of the project, Senhuile-Sénéthanol has faced stiff resistance from local populations.

First incorporated as Senéthanol, the company originally intended to develop intensive production of sweet potato for bioethanol in the Rural Community (CR)<sup>1</sup> of Fanaye.<sup>2</sup> When violent protests against the project led to two deaths and many wounded, former Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade decided to move the operation from Fanaye to the forest and wetland preserve of Ndiaël.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, the president changed the classification of a natural protected area and overlooked the 40 rural villages that rely on this land for food and pasture. The company, which is now operating as Senhuile, has already cleared land and begun growing operations within the reserve.

By moving the project from Fanaye to Ndiaël, the state simply transferred the burden to a different population. Semi-nomadic herding is the main economic activity of the approximately 9,000 inhabitants in the project area.<sup>4</sup> The plantation poses a major threat to the livelihoods of this population, as it occupies vital grazing land and prevents access to food, water, and firewood. In addition, the project will displace villages located within its territory.<sup>5</sup>

The corporate structure of Senhuile-Sénéthanol is complex and obscure, and what exactly the company plans to grow—and to what end—is unclear.<sup>6</sup> While the exact business intentions of the project remain murky, it has already had a significant impact on the lives of the people of Ndiaël. Should the project continue, thousands of residents will be forced from their homes and villages to make way for a foreign company that nobody knows much about. Rather than acquiesce to the needs of shady foreign investors, the government should instead consider requests from local communities to further develop their own sustainable small-scale food systems.



Senhuile sunflower plantation with machinery in background.  
© Davide Cirillo

## A Direct Threat to Local Villages

The 20,000 hectares of land allocated for Senhuile-Senéthanol's current agro-industrial project were originally leased to the company in March 2012 for a period of 50 years. The land spans three different Rural Communities in Ndiaël: Ngnith, Diama, and Ronkh.<sup>7</sup> Many of the affected families have resided in the area for many decades—well before the zone was declared a natural reserve and internationally recognized wetland.<sup>8</sup> This established presence gave the communities a right to use the land for wood, food, medicinal plants, saps and resins, and—crucially—for pasture.<sup>9</sup> Some 40,000 cows, 20,000 sheep, 21,000 goats, and 4,000 horses and donkeys are grazed in the area, the only zone in the region that is still available for pastureland.<sup>10</sup> Pastoralists' ability to use this area has reduced the risk of conflict over land with farmers who cultivate the area around the periphery of the reserve.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of their well-established presence, a map produced by state technicians before the start of the project confirmed the existence of only 6 of the 40 villages and hamlets using the land leased to the company (see Figure 1).<sup>12</sup> Missing over 30 villages seems more than a simple mistake. The local communities feel completely left out of the decision making process. As Wouri Daillo, the chief of Njurki village, states, “we almost feel like we’re not a part of this country anymore. They give us no consideration, no one considers us.”<sup>13</sup>

*We almost feel like we’re not a part of this country anymore. They give us no consideration.*

—Wouri Daillo, Njurki village chief, April 2013

The principal ethnic group within the disregarded villages is Peuhl.<sup>14</sup> Extensive livestock systems comprise the principal economic activity of the communities.<sup>15</sup> Families also have small-scale agricultural plots outside the Ndialanabé reserve that provide people with food and additional income.

Given how crucial livestock is to the livelihoods of the communities of the Ndialanabé reserve, the loss of grazing land with the Senhuile-Senéthanol plantation is particularly problematic for the local communities. Samba Sow, the chief of Ndialanabé village, describes the situation: “the consequences are that now the livestock is sold for pennies because our land was grabbed by these powerful men with the complicity of the state.”<sup>16</sup> Unable to feed their livestock—the basis of their livelihood—many villagers have been stripped of their ability to feed themselves and their families.

The Senhuile-Senéthanol lease also obstructs the local communities' access to food, water, and firewood. Passage along customary routes between villages and access to water is blocked and the leased land is under constant surveillance by security guards hired by the company.<sup>17</sup> This dramatically increases the time and energy locals spend gathering drinking water and firewood. Women from Yowré village report they have to walk more than ten kilometers every morning to access the nearest water source.<sup>18</sup> Amadou Sow, chief of Thiamène Beli Bambi village, says the constraint of the project “asphyxiates and kills our activity and our villages. . . . In 15 villages, the pastoralists have started to dust their suitcases to go to other zones.”<sup>19</sup>

In addition to adversely impacting the livelihoods of the local population, there are reports alleging that the company destroyed sacred and religious spaces, cemeteries, and schools.<sup>20</sup> Residents report verbal intimidation and physical assaults by the police deployed to block access to the project area.<sup>21</sup> Heightened security measures implemented to protect the company have increased police encounters and violence, exacerbating tensions between citizens and the company.<sup>22</sup>



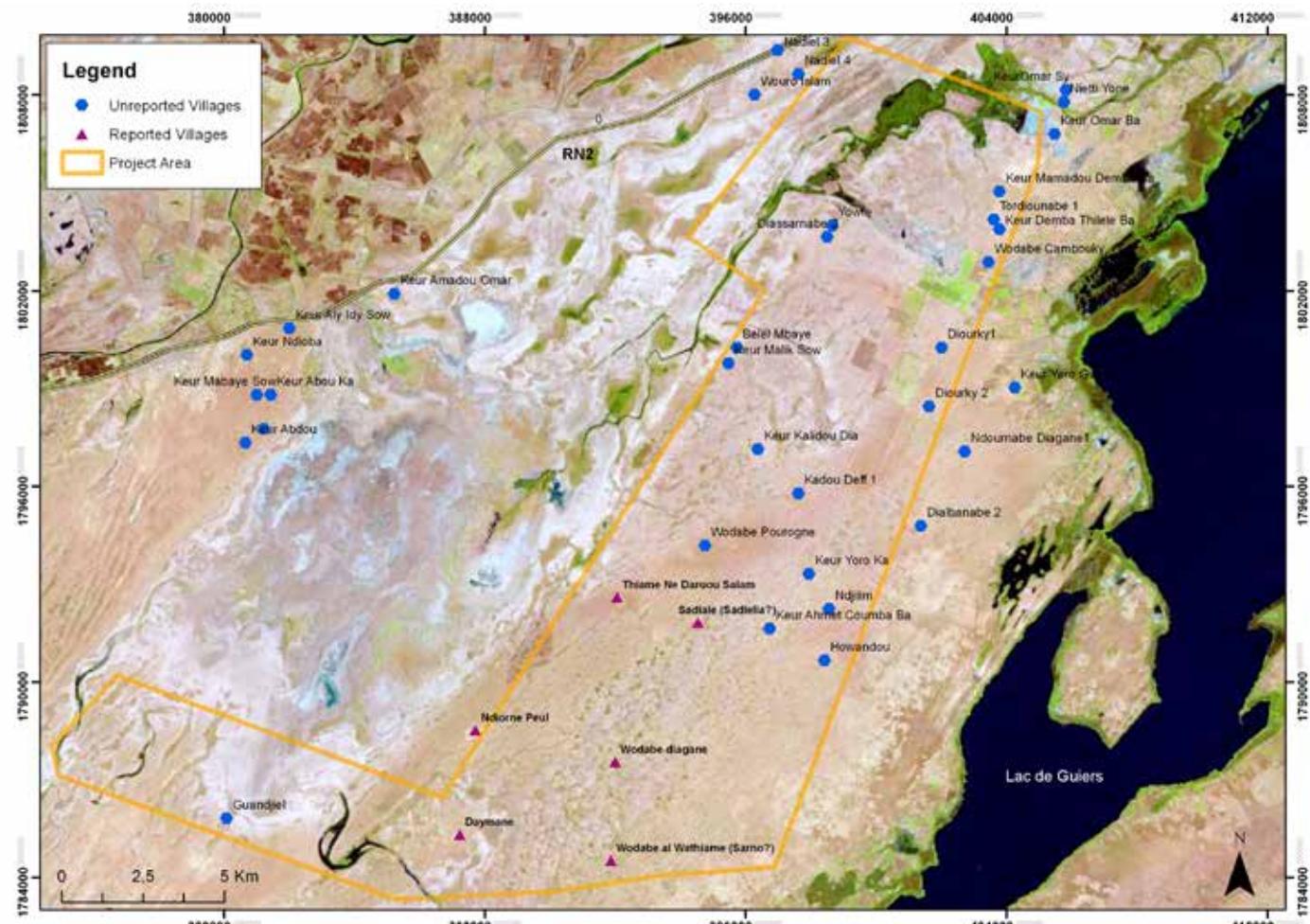
Senhuile-Sénéthanol promised to establish hospitals, schools, jobs, and scholarships, however nothing has materialized.<sup>23</sup> Instead, villagers witness the destruction of essential community spaces such as routes between villages, paths to access water, and pasture land.

Deprived of land for pasture and prevented from addressing basic needs, inhabitants of the zone will be forced to leave their homes if Senhuile-Sénéthanol operations continue. As described by Rougui Sow, a villager from Kadoudef, “We have no more herding routes. We only have these wells left and they want to remove those, too. If they take the wells, we will have nowhere to go for water. If the project stays here, we will be obliged to leave our village.”<sup>24</sup> Unable to continue to raise their livestock, access water, or travel freely on land they have inhabited for decades, the people of Ndial will have no choice but to pack up and leave their homes and villages.

*We have no more herding routes. We only have these wells left and they want to remove those, too. If they take the wells, we will have nowhere to go for water. If the project stays here, we will be obliged to leave our village.*

—Rougui Sow, villager from Kadoudef, April 2013

FIGURE 1: MAP OF VILLAGES INCLUDED AND EXCLUDED FROM THE MAP PRODUCED BY STATE TECHNICIANS





The Senhuile-Senéthanol project will force the village of Thiamène Beli Bambi to relocate. © Ebrima Sillah

#### BOX 1: WHO IS BEHIND SENHUILE-SENÉTHANOL?

The Senhuile-Senéthanol project began as Senéthanol SA in Fanaye. The company started operating as Senhuile SA when it relocated to Ndiaël. Senhuile SA is a Dakar-based joint venture owned by Senéthanol SA (49%) and Italian-based Tampieri Financial Group (51%). Senéthanol is in turn owned by ABE Italia (75%) and “Senegalese Investors” (25%). The co-directors of Senhuile are Benjamin Dummai and Momath Bâ, with Gora Seck as its chair.

Senéthanol SA was incorporated in Dakar on July 14, 2010 with CEO Benjamin Dummai, managing director Mario Marcandelli, and director of operations Momath Bâ. The company originally intended to take advantage of state policy initiatives to support biofuel development as an alternative to fossil fuels. The Tampieri Financial Group, a large family-owned Italian holding company involved in the domestic energy sector, claims it has joined this project in order to secure raw materials for its edible oil business.

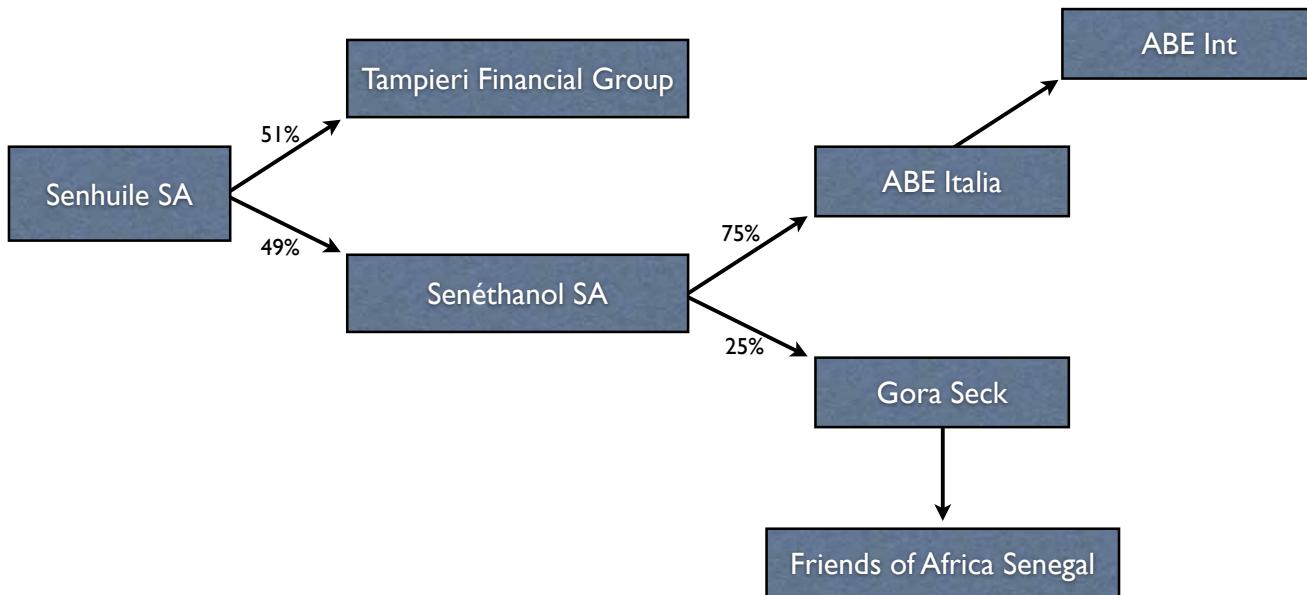
Dummai is an Israeli-born, Brazilian-naturalized businessman with 30 years of business experience in Latin America and Africa. He operates several of the companies involved in the ownership of Senhuile. He has also run a number of shell companies with people who work for the controversial Panamanian law firm Aleman, Cordero, Galindo & Lee, which was involved in laundering money for former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. These same business associates have been involved in tax and fiscal fraud scandals with US companies. Additionally, Dummai has been charged with financial fraud by Brazilian authorities, and he and his wife were found guilty of tax evasion in Brazil.

ABE Italia is most likely a subsidiary of Agro Bioethanol Int LLC (ABE Int), a shell company set up in New York on October 1, 2009. Established in April 2011, ABE Italia was put into liquidation in January of 2013. Its initial member was Wallace Oceania Ltd of New Zealand and its initial manager was Harmodio Herrera of Panama. At that time, Wallace Oceana had one director, Carolyn Melville, who directed thousands of shell companies in tax havens around the world with the help of her husband. Similarly, Herrera was registered as director of hundreds of shell companies in Panama. Herrera has also been implicated in high-level political scandals, money laundering, and tax evasion. In September 2011, Dummai took over management of ABE Int. Its shareholders are unknown.

“Senegalese Investors,” which own a quarter share of Senéthanol, includes Senegalese businessman Gora Seck, who serves as CEO of over half a dozen Senegalese firms. He co-directs two of these ventures with Ibrahima Basse, a high-level official in the Ministry of Mines and Industry. He also chairs the Friends of Africa Foundation Senegal, which is tasked with implementing the social component of the Senhuile project.

\* Adapted from “Who is behind Senhuile-Senethanol?” by CRAFS, GRAIN, and Re:Common, November 7, 2013

**FIGURE 2: SENHUILE-SENÉTHANOL COMPANY MATRIX**



## Plans for Large-Scale Irrigation in a Semi-Arid Zone

The Senhuile project requires massive amounts of water, a precious resource in the semi-arid Sahelian zones of northern Senegal. The project takes water from Lac de Guiers, the only water reservoir in the lower Senegal River Basin, which provides water to several cities, including 65 percent of the total water consumed in Dakar.<sup>25</sup> It is used extensively by the local population as a source of freshwater throughout the dry season, which lasts between nine and ten months.<sup>26</sup>

Increasing competition for water has amplified the need for water use restriction and proper water management. In 1977, Ndial was registered in the Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance. The Ramsar Convention is an intergovernmental treaty designed to protect and ensure the sustainable use of important wetlands. This protection

was broken in 2011 when President Wade partially changed the classification of the zone in order to allow Senhuile-Senéthanol to operate in the area (see Box 2).

There are already significant issues that affect water security in this semi-arid zone, including chemical pollution, salinization, and eutrophication (excessive growth of algae due to high concentration of phosphates and nitrates).<sup>27</sup> In spite of this, Senhuile was allowed to put additional strain on the Lac de Guiers without proper analysis of potential impacts. A social and environmental impact study was not even conducted until November, 2012, long after the company had started to clear land.<sup>28</sup> Commenting on the contradictory phenomenon of granting use of scarce resources to a large foreign company, the Collective for the Defense of the Ndial Reserve, a local group organized to defend the reserve against Senhuile's operations, cynically states, "it seems as though there is nothing more fertile than the desert, if it's watered with enough money."<sup>29</sup>

*It seems as though there is nothing more fertile than the desert, if it's watered with enough money.*

—Collective for the Defense of the Ndial Reserve, May 2013.

Senhuile's current irrigation system uses an inefficient canal and jet system.<sup>30</sup> The fountain jets spray the crops at a 45 degree angle and open-air canals channel water to the plantation, causing an enormous quantity of water to evaporate daily.<sup>31</sup> Not only do the open water canals waste valuable water resources, they are also a serious safety hazard. In June 2013, three children drowned after falling into the canals.<sup>32</sup> It is unknown whether there has been an official inquiry into the situation to determine responsibility.



Local farmers cultivate their family plots on the outskirts of the Ndial reserve. © Enda Pronat

## The Struggle for Land Rights

Local communities have opposed the Senhuile-Senéthanol project since the beginning of its operations. Senéthanol began to clear land in Fanaye after a very opaque consultation in which the majority of residents were informed of the project only after it had begun.<sup>33</sup>

The first clashes in Fanaye took place between supporters and opponents of the project in July 2011, as soon as the company began to clear land and install agricultural equipment. During one incident, six local residents were arrested and detained for ten days.<sup>34</sup>

The opponents of the project cite four main concerns:<sup>35</sup>

- 1 The size of the project (20,000 hectares) is too large; foreigners will occupy 32% of the arable land of the Rural Community.
- 2 56 hamlets and 6 villages will be forced to relocate.
- 3 Land for pasture, lakes, and protected forest will disappear.
- 4 Local people will be turned into agricultural plantation laborers.

On October 26, 2011 opponents organized a protest in front of the Fanaye administrative building.<sup>36</sup> Informed of the protest, the local authorities sent police to ensure that the demonstration would not disturb the functioning of the

project. Tension between opponents and supporters of the project led to the fatal shooting of two residents and many others were wounded. The community building that served as a meeting hall for rural authorities was burned down.<sup>37</sup>

Following the violence in Fanaye, President Wade decided to move the project. On March 20, 2012, he signed two decrees: one that removed environmental protection designations, including the Ramsar classification, from 26,550 hectares of the Ndial reserve, and another that bestowed 20,000 hectares of the same land to the agro-industrial project Senhuile-Senéthanol for a period of 50 years. The remaining 6,550 hectares were reserved for the relocation of the villages residing within the boundaries of the area given to the company,<sup>38</sup> but the decree did not establish any guidelines for this relocation (see Box 2).

The conflict has had lasting administrative and social consequences despite the brevity of the company's stay in Fanaye. The project significantly damaged the functioning of the local government, paralyzed economic activity, and contributed to social conflict within the community.<sup>39</sup>

## Continued Resistance in Ndial

Despite attempts to avoid opposition and conflict by relocating the project to Ndial, the state and the company are simply shifting the problems to a different location. Local residents state that they were not notified of the project until they woke up one morning to machines clearing their land.<sup>40</sup>



The livestock of Ndiaël will have nowhere to graze if the Senhuile project continues. © Ebrimah Silla

The communities of Ndiaël have held repeated protests and meetings with officials to voice their concerns and protect their villages and livelihoods. They established the Collective for the Defense of the Ndiaël Reserve, composed of residents from all of the villages of Ndiaël, to defend the rights of the communities.

On April 12, 2012, at the beginning of his term, the current president, Macky Sall, repealed the decree that changed the classification of the reserve and leased the land to the company.<sup>41</sup> A few months later, on August 9, 2012, a delegation from Ndiaël was invited to a meeting at the Radisson Hotel in Dakar, where they negotiated a compromise with Senhuile representatives. Under this compromise, the company agreed to limit the biofuel project to a 10,000-hectare area proposed by community leaders.<sup>42</sup> Little did the collective know that a few days earlier, August 6, 2012, President Sall had repealed his April 12 decree, thereby reinstating former president Wade's decree that changed the land classification and leased the area to Senhuile.<sup>43</sup> This action was taken without any consultation or communication with the communities in Ndiaël.<sup>44</sup> This decree allows Senhuile-Sénéthanol to continue to work outside the boundaries of the 10,000 hectares agreed upon during the August 9 meeting. Feeling betrayed, local communities have no trust in the company and relations have further deteriorated.<sup>45</sup>

The collective remains committed to saving their land. Rather than negotiate downsizing the amount of land leased to the company, its members now demand that the company completely withdraws before they will participate

in any further negotiations. Specifically, the collective demands the following:<sup>46</sup>

- All work to stop and for Senhuile-Sénéthanol to withdraw from the zone.
- The erection of a wall around the open-water canals for the protection of children and animals.
- The opening of travel routes between villages.
- Direct and supervised consultation between the collective and the promoters of the project.
- The surrender of project documents (such as impact studies).
- The repeal of the August 6, 2012 presidential decree.

If these demands are met, the collective is willing to negotiate a new land lease. They may consider the project if two-thirds of the cleared area is converted for use by local villages as small family plots and pasture land.<sup>47</sup> One-third of the area could be given to Senhuile-Sénéthanol, provided there are precise geographic limits. The company would also be required to reforest the area they have already cleared that is outside of this zone.

According to resident Dieynaba Alpha Omar Sow from Alhamdou Njurki 2 village, “our life has been thrown upside-down by this project. . . . They can beat us because they are stronger than us. They can even kill us. But we will never agree with this project.”<sup>48</sup> Fighting for their lives, residents cannot accept the presence of a company that actively destroys their livelihoods. Should the company



Women of Ngnith collect water in the early morning. Impeding access to water is one way Senhuile restricts village life in Ndial. © Enda Pronat

and the government continue to disregard the demands of residents, violence may again escalate to fatal levels.

## Unclear Territory

Despite the imposing presence of Senhuile-Sénéthanol in Ndial, significant information about its operations is missing. One of the primary questions is what exactly are they producing? Originally established to grow sweet potato to produce bioethanol for export to Europe, Senhuile-Sénéthanol has changed its plans several times. Tampieri Financial Group's interest in the company is apparently to access raw sunflower grains for its edible oil business.<sup>49</sup> However, the Senegalese press also announced a joint project with the Institut Senegalais de Recherches Agricoles (ISRA) to produce peanut seeds for research and for local consumption.<sup>50</sup> Maize has also been identified as one of the main crops.<sup>51</sup> It is unclear what Senhuile-Sénéthanol has planted, on how much land, and for what purposes. Access to the project is blocked and no one is allowed to approach the area.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, the complex maze of companies involved in the operation raises questions and concerns about the legal structure (see Box 1). Many of these questions surround Sénéthanol's CEO Benjamin Dummai. It is not clear why Dummai would hire a prominent Panamanian law firm that is implicated in high-level corporate crimes and international scandals to set up an anonymous shell organization in New York to then run small operations in Senegal.

Senegalese investor Gora Seck also raises concerns. He co-directs two companies with Ibrahima Basse, a government

official from the Senegalese Ministry of Mines. One of these companies appears to have greatly benefited from generous government support.<sup>53</sup> As he is the CEO of more than half a dozen Senegalese firms, a legitimate question is whether Seck serves as a straw man for foreign companies interested in exploiting local resources in Senegal.

Furthermore, while Seck and Dummai are the visible faces behind Sénéthanol, it is still unclear who is behind them, if anyone. The identity of the investors is hidden. Without knowing who is behind the project, it is impossible to know who is ultimately accountable for potential mishaps and disasters, especially since the parent company (ABE Italia) is in liquidation.

A final component in the mystery of Senhuile-Sénéthanol's operations pertains to the various presidential decrees. Former President Wade's decree number 2012/366, which changed the classification of the Ndial reserve, is not available on the government website. Furthermore, it is unclear why President Sall first abrogated Wade's two decrees that changed the classification of the Ndial land and leased the land to Senhuile-Sénéthanol, and then a few months later reversed that decree and restored the land to Senhuile-Sénéthanol without consulting local communities. APIX, the Senegalese public agency in charge of attracting foreign investment, did not respond to several inquiries from the Oakland Institute seeking information about the project.

Neither the government of Senegal nor the company are providing answers to the many questions that surround

## **BOX 2: HOW SENHUILE-SENÉTHANOL USED THE LAND TENURE SYSTEM TO ACQUIRE LAND IN SENEGAL**

Senhuile-Sénéthanol used two different methods to acquire land. Under the 1964 Loi 64-46 sur le Domaine National (LDN), the principal act concerning land tenure in Senegal, land was originally managed by the state. Decentralization policy in 1996 transferred rural land management to Rural Communities (CR). Decentralization policy also gave CRs responsibility over healthcare, infrastructure, education, etc.; however, many CRs in the interior of the country severely lacked consistent funding from the central government for these projects. At the same time, the LDN states that land can only be allocated to the residents of CRs or for development purposes that increased the value of the land (Art. 8 LDN). However, due to lack of funds, development is prioritized over residents, and CRs began to allocate land to foreigners who promised funds in return. This is how Senéthanol came to control 20,000 hectares of land in Fanaye.

In Fanaye, Senéthanol negotiated with the local community council for land and the president of the CR accorded the acquisition without properly consulting the communities. President Wade stopped the investment after the violent protest on October 26, 2011.

In Ndiaël, the company negotiated directly with the central government and bypassed the CR. Although the project area involves the land of three CRs, it is part of a natural reserve and is directly managed by the central government. Wade downgraded Ndiaël from Domaine National designation through presidential decree 2012/366 citing reasons of public interest (*utilité publique*) in order to bestow the land to Senhuile. This decree has not been made public and it is not clear whether the area is now part of the public domain or private domain. Furthermore, the subsequent presidential decree (2012/367) that leases the area to Senhuile does not indicate whether the company is paying for the land. The decree also assigns 6,550 hectares for the eventual displacement of the villages within the Senhuile project area, however it does not specify anything about how this land will be used, distributed, or managed.

the Senhuile-Sénéthanol project. Were the company to fulfill its social and environmental promises and contribute to the well-being of local communities, such covert operations would be unnecessary. Instead of addressing the development needs of the communities of Ndiaël, this government-supported project only exacerbates food, economic, and environmental insecurity in the region.

### **Development Paradigm: Large-Scale Monocrop Plantation Prioritized over Pastoralist Communities**

The food and energy crises of 2007-2008 and subsequent recurrent food price fluctuations prompted President Wade to establish several public initiatives aimed at increasing food production, stabilizing food prices, and acquiring energy independence.<sup>54</sup> Initiatives such as GOANA (the Great Initiative for Food and Abundance plan) and REVA (Return to Agriculture plan), as well as a decision to expand biofuel production, have underpinned Senegal's shift toward large-scale land acquisitions in recent years.<sup>55</sup> These state policies have been accompanied by support provided to private investors through APIX, the Senegalese investment

promotion agency, which has promoted large-scale land acquisitions throughout the country.<sup>56</sup> As a case in point, the Environmental and Social Impact Study conducted by Senhuile-Sénéthanol cites the government initiative to promote production of jatropha (a plant used for biofuel) to justify the agricultural project in Ndiaël.<sup>57</sup>

Although these government initiatives were created to address economic and food insecurity, the lease offered to Senhuile-Sénéthanol runs counter to the goals set by the government. Instead of bringing food security, such leases result in farmers and rural peasants thrown off of their land—their primary resource—to make way for large foreign firms that intend to export their products.

Supporters of the Senhuile-Sénéthanol project cite opportunities for employment, infrastructure creation, reforestation, construction of schools, and other social projects that will benefit local populations.<sup>58</sup> Actual evidence of these projects or formal documents guaranteeing these commitments cannot be found. This agro-industrial project is not automatically leading rural communities down the road to prosperity. On the contrary,



Refrigerated container trucks wait to be loaded. © Ebrima Sillah

the Senhuile-Sénéthanol operations put the economic, social, and ecological stability of Ndial at risk, and the large agricultural project uses scarce resources very inefficiently as compared to pastoral economies.

In semi-arid and arid landscapes, such as northern Senegal, pastoral systems produce food through resource-efficient mobile livestock herds; in these systems, pastoral livestock consume a high degree of protein not suitable for human consumption in harsh environments that are not suitable for crop cultivation.<sup>59</sup> In countries with dominant pastoral systems, the ratio between human-edible protein that is fed to livestock and the human-edible protein generated by livestock is between 15 and 20 times higher than in countries with industrialized meat systems.<sup>60</sup>

Properly managed pastoral systems have both a low carbon footprint and decreased cost of production compared to industrial production. Because animals walk to access food and water produced without large-scale agricultural development, pastoral systems are largely independent of fossil fuels. Well-managed pastoral systems are also highly adaptable to climate change, as they are inherently designed for unstable and unpredictable environments and climatic conditions.<sup>61</sup>

The Senhuile-Sénéthanol project, on the other hand, uses critical supplies of water and land in the intensive production of crops that will not feed local populations. By utilizing already threatened local resources for export-crop cultivation, the Senhuile-Sénéthanol project stamps

out any possibility of the region attaining food security through sustainable pastoral systems. The government of Senegal has overlooked investing in pastoral systems of Ndial, choosing instead to support a large and destructive monoculture plantation.

Disregard for pastoralists is evident in the Environmental and Social Impact Study commissioned by the company in 2012. The study asserts that the pastoral communities suffer from a lack of professionalism and that they are opposed to innovation and modernization due to sociocultural reasons.<sup>62</sup> It argues that local populations fear the Senhuile-Sénéthanol project because they are clinging to their traditional practices and are incapable of imagining any other way of life. This point of view not only paints rural populations as helpless and backward, it also overlooks the fact that villages have been trying in vain to gain access to land to further develop their own small-scale farms and food production systems. Over the last few years, local farmers and pastoralists have repeatedly tried to gain access to land but were denied due to environmental protection measures.<sup>63</sup> The government easily reclassified and leased 20,000 hectares of a formerly protected natural reserve to a foreign company for intensive agricultural production, yet overlooked the requests of local residents who sought to further enhance and develop environmentally sustainable small-scale production that would benefit locals.

# Conclusion: The Communities of Ndialaël Cannot Live with Senhuile-Sénéthanol

The Senhuile-Sénéthanol project harms local populations and its operations are characterized by an extreme lack of transparency. The local population wants the government and Senhuile-Sénéthanol to return land—which was conceded under very questionable circumstances—to the residents of Ndialaël. Rather than surrender natural resources and vital land area to foreign companies with suspicious ties and cloudy operations, the Senegalese government should listen to the residents and communities and promote projects that are in the interest of the local population and efficiently use and maintain natural resources.

Local communities have made themselves perfectly clear: they want the Senhuile-Sénéthanol project to be stopped. While the reclassification of the Ndialaël reserve certainly enhances the value of the land for Senhuile, it destroys the value of the land for local populations. The people of Ndialaël could theoretically profit from the creation of jobs, roads, and infrastructure, however, the company's mode of operation is leading to further destruction of communities, livelihoods, ecosystems, and natural resources.

Presidential-led national initiatives stemming from the 2008 food and energy crises claim to seek self-sufficiency, however, the Senhuile-Sénéthanol case demonstrates how government decisions prioritize large foreign investment projects with unclear goals at the expense of local

communities. As the Collective for the Defense of the Ndialaël Reserve states, “it is unimaginable that over 200 square kilometers should be allocated to one single enterprise with the objective of producing biofuel destined for vehicles in European state[s], at a time that the government spends several billion to import millions of tons of food to feed the Senegalese people.”<sup>64</sup> Future agricultural investment in Senegal needs to acknowledge and assess resources needed for existing livelihoods, as well as the potential to support pastoralism and small-scale farming. Development projects should prioritize the welfare of local communities over supporting shadowy foreign investors, and should have reliable mechanisms to guarantee the protection of water, forests, and other natural resources. The government of Senegal needs to fundamentally reassess its rural development strategy.

The villages of the Ndialaël reserve have already witnessed significant deterioration of livelihoods and resources, intimidation, and conflict surrounding project. Their opposition to the project comes as no surprise. As Samba Sow of Ndialanabe village states, “for us, our primary wealth is the land, and the government cheated us.”<sup>65</sup> It is time for the web of companies involved in Senhuile-Sénéthanol to withdraw from Ndialaël, and for the government to engage rural communities in decisions regarding their resources and their future.

# Endnotes

- 1 Rural Communities are a fourth-level administrative division of Senegal comprised of small villages and hamlets.
- 2 ActionAid and Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale (IPAR). "Impact des investissements agricole italiens dans les biocarburants au Sénégal." April 2012.
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