

Environmental sustainability dakar

Farmers started planting along the edge of the filao strip in 2011, says Ousmane Sow, president of the Warouwaye farmers' association. "Since establishing ourselves in the strip, the farmers have expanded their activity. Today, we are 168 farmers growing vegetables for sale in the strip."

The farmers sell their organic produce in the city's markets. Their association is a bulwark for the protection of the strip of trees, constantly threatened by the ocean, climate change and, above all, by the frenetic expansion of the city of Dakar.

Up to 80% of Senegal's vegetables are grown in the niayes, low-lying areas in the dune systems that stretch 180 kilometers (110 miles) between Dakar and Saint-Louis. Beginning in the late 1940s, filao trees (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), a kind of pine native to Australia and the Pacific region, were planted to stabilize the dunes, eventually forming a protective strip of wooded land covering more than 9,000 hectares (22,200 acres). But since the 1970s, the filao and the niayes on the outskirts of Dakar have been threatened by the city's expansion.

The four municipal areas through which the filao strip runs were largely undeveloped in the mid-1980s. But between 1984 and 2019, the proportion of built-up areas grew from just 18% to 75%, putting increasing pressure on the strip of trees, according to researchers N?n? Makoya Tour? Diop and Giacomo Pettenati.

Dakar is one of the largest cities in Africa, they write in a 2021 study. From a population of 400,000 in the 1970s, its population quadrupled in the space of 20 years, thanks to a rural exodus driven by drought.

The northern districts of the capital received a fresh influx of people in 2011, this time farmers fleeing flooding in other parts of the country. Some began growing vegetables in the filao strip, reaching an agreement with the Senegalese environment ministry's department of water and forests, the public body responsible for the management of the country's forests and protected areas.

Sow shows Mongabay some of the plots in Pikine district where dozens of people of all ages are working among the filao trees, spreading fertilizer made from peanut husks and watering the crops. All kinds of vegetables are grown here: aubergines, peppers, okra, onions.

"The strip was targeted by people looking for sand for construction, as well as by local residents who don't hesitate to cut wood for fuel," Sow says. "So the farmers are here to counter this while they work, contributing to the economy on the one hand, while also monitoring the environment and protecting the strip."

Omar Boudian is one of the farmers who originally settled in the filao strip in 2011, and later joined the

Warouwaye association. "What prompted us to come here is the search for an economic activity, an income. Then we organized ourselves, and we saw that it was necessary to create a system so that we could also participate in protecting the forest," Boudian tells Mongabay beneath a coconut tree.

With funding from the European Union and support from CISV, an Italian NGO, the Warouwaye farmers have gradually adopted organic methods to make the sandy soil fertile. "Before our arrival, there was an informal association between farmers, who worked individually," says Ousseynou Mbodji, CISV project manager. The EU project, in collaboration with the department of water and forests, provided the farmers with tools, credit and training, to stimulate a participatory management system.

"With our project we have worked to organize them better, frame them to organize production in order to more effectively meet the demand for vegetables from neighboring municipalities. Meanwhile, with training courses, we helped farmers to adopt ecological farming methods, eliminating the use of pesticides and switching to organic fertilizers," Mbodji says.

But in the past year, a new threat has emerged. In June 2021, Senegalese President Macky Sall authorized a new urban plan that declassified 150 hectares of the filao strip, depriving it of its protected status, and transferring development authority from the forest department to the local municipalities.

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