

Climate change is not the cause, migration is not the problem:

Local representation and precarious young
farmers leaving Senegal.

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Abstract

This research report is the result of a project that aims to understand the multiple treatable causes for climate-related migration from the Sahel towards Europe and the role of local political representation through local government in addressing those causes. This project examines the role of local governments – the function of representation – in generating or reducing the current trend in which vulnerable people are migrating out of areas where climate variability is viewed as a driver of outmigration. The project seeks to identify means to make policy and practical responses to climate change supportive of local democracy – to make these responses emancipatory – and therefore a transformative force for equity, justice, and security.

Field research was conducted in the Tambacounda Region of Senegal and in the Dantiandou and Say Districts of Niger where out-migration is prevalent and where the consequences of this migration are often dire – many migrants die in route to Europe and many simply disappear and do not return home, leaving their communities and families with less labour, a great loss from having invested in the migration of their children, and with the grief of loss.

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Preface

The mandate of the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is to contribute to poverty reduction by promoting local democracy in low and middle-income countries. To fulfil this mandate, we offer decentralised cooperation through our municipal partnership programme, capacity building programmes through our international training programmes, and exchange of knowledge through our knowledge centre. ICLD documents and publishes key lessons learned from our ongoing activities, initiates and funds relevant research, engages in scholarly networks, and organizes conferences and workshops. We also maintain a publications series. This report presents results from empirical research conducted in the Tambacounda Region of Senegal that was part of a larger comparative study conducted in both Senegal and Niger (Tillabéri Region) from 2017 to 2018.

In this report the authors present findings on the multiple treatable causes of labour emigration from the Sahel toward Europe and the potential role of political representation through local government in addressing these causes. They relate to social, economic and livelihood conditions farmers are facing at home, combined with the aspirations young farmers have to fulfil their lives. However, the long-standing narrative that Sahelians are merely poor or that young

men are fleeing the Sahel due to climate stress seems to be inadequate. These simplistic explanations occlude the multitude of causes of precarity that local farmers recount. Yes, climate affects farmers' lives, but it is not even among the causes that they cite for their precarity. They cite low prices for their products, debt, discriminatory public policy, distorted markets, and social conditions hostile to farmers staying at home. In response, local government authorities have many ideas, and in some instances have developed project proposals, about what should be done to prevent and reduce the damages resulting from illegal outmigration. However, local governments are rarely consulted during the conception of anti-migration projects, nor do they receive associated funds. The authors conclude that emigration is viewed positively by local authorities because it generates remittances for communities and families. While they are motivated to prevent illegal emigration along dangerous routes, they often lack the mandate and resources to do so. And it is in this area that support is greatly needed.

Visby, Sweden, May 2019



Johan Lilja
Secretary General, ICLD

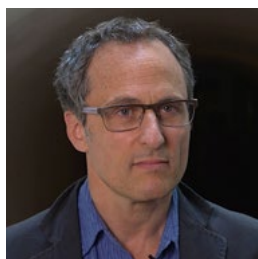
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Introduction

Being able to depart from where we will is the prototypical gesture of being free, as limitation of freedom of movement has from time immemorial been the precondition for enslavement.

Hannah Arendt 1968:9

Migration is the product of a broad set of conditions. It is a normal livelihood practice in the Sahel; it is also a human right and an important element of secure sub-Saharan life – it is not merely a problem. Migration pathways, however, have become more and more dangerous due to political changes in Europe and North Africa. This report explores why Sahelian farmers continue to migrate and how elected local governments could influence their departure decisions and, in cases of departure, improve the security of migrant travels.

This report presents results from empirical research conducted in the Tambacounda Region of Senegal that was part of a larger comparative study conducted in both Senegal and Niger (Tillabéri Region) from 2017 to 2018. These are two Sahelian countries with elected local government that can, through comparison, provide deeply needed lessons for democratic local authorities wherever climate-related security and migration pressures are at play. These regions, where the authors have worked for many years, have experienced significant outmigration with many departing to the north on illegal Trans-Saharan migration. The research was organized around four research questions:

1. Why do young farmers choose or feel compelled to migrate toward Europe versus remaining in Tambacounda?
2. Why do they decide to take the risks and how do they rationalize facing the dangers along the route to Europe via illegal overland routes such as Libya?
3. What is the role of local political representation – in particular by elected local governments – in shaping people's desire or need to migrate?
4. What is the role of local political representation in buffering people against climate and other stressors that have been associated with outmigration?

A multi-level research design was followed involving a mix of group and individual interviews conducted in a total of 30 villages.¹ Within these 30 villages, heads of households with or without migrants, returned migrants, and village youth were interviewed.² These village-based interviews were supplemented by interviews of key informants such as village Imams, mayors, and local NGO officials.³ This report is focused on Senegal as the political conditions and other circumstances delayed completion and analysis of the in-depth qualitative interviews in Niger.

In this report we present findings on the multiple treatable causes of labour emigration from the Sahel toward Europe and the potential role of political representation through local government in addressing these causes. We explore representation within the wide array of causes of precarity – which we summarize as failed access to resources, markets, services and representation.

As will be elaborated in this report, we found many causes of youth departures. They relate to social, economic and livelihood conditions farmers are facing at home, combined with the aspirations young farmers have to live fuller lives. However, the long-standing narrative that Sahelians are merely poor or that young men are fleeing the Sahel due to climate stress are wrong.

1. Within the two communes studied in Senegal, ten villages in each were selected to include villages that were most, moderately, and least affected by migration. All 1,000 households in the twenty study villages were surveyed on their experience with emigration toward Europe. In Niger, migration toward Europe and North Africa is new and growing but is much less prevalent than in Senegal. As a result, preliminary research was conducted to identify villages within the two study departments with households experiencing Europe-bound migration. Of these, ten villages were selected (one "village" being a single neighborhood of the large town of Say) in which all 1094 households were surveyed.

2. 60 returning migrants in Senegal and 66 in Niger. To study migration prospects and motives of youth farming within the study villages, we also surveyed 100 young farmers in Senegal and 100 in Niger. more than 40 returning migrants and young farmers in Senegal and 30 in Niger were interviewed in depth.

3. We interviewed 11 elected local government authorities or mayors, 13 village chiefs, 7 Imams and 1 marabout in the region of Tambacounda and 11 elected local government authorities or members of their staff in Niger, 4 village chiefs, and 29 non-elected local authorities, government officials and heads of local NGOs.

These simplistic explanations occlude the multitude of causes of precarity that local farmers recount. Yes, climate affects farmers' lives, but it is not even among the causes that they cite for their precarity. They cite low prices for their products, debt, discriminatory public policy, distorted markets, and social conditions hostile to farmers staying at home. The data present a multi-causal perspective on outmigration from the Sahel.

The decision to migrate is personal but it is rooted in rationalizations that emphasize desire and aspirations to serve the family: build a family home and assist the family during the hungry season (the period of food deficit prior to each harvest). Parents fear the risk and dangers of illegal migration, but support migration when it is safe. After agricultural income, remittances from migrants play a central place in family stability, social status and hope.

While national governments and international NGO interventions, mostly funded by the EU are working to reduce emigration from the Sahel through professional training programmes and other initiatives, the research shows that young farmers in Tambacounda still see emigration to Europe as the best option they have. They often say "Europe or food for the fish" and "Barcelona or death" when they leave (Diop 2008). While these phrases appear fatalistic, they reflect the strong desire of young men to create meaningful roles and a future by taking fate into their own hands. In the Sahel, we saw the inefficiency and inappropriateness of currently centralized migration projects for addressing local needs and aspirations. We also saw aid interventions systematically circumvent local elected government authorities in migration project design and decision-making processes, despite that elected local authorities have a moral responsibility to assist bereaved families within their jurisdictions and also have knowledge of possible alternatives to irregular outmigration. Further, remittances were up to twelve percent of Senegal's GDP in 2014. Under these conditions, the central government, despite its discourse on stemming emigration, has a strong disincentive to stop outmigration. There are significant benefits from emigrants' collective investments at home

in sectors such as education, health and environment. In short, concerning the role of elected local government in vulnerability reduction in the case of risks related to emigration, we observed:

1. For elected local government authorities, rather than being merely a problem, migration also presents an opportunity for their constituencies to realize the wellbeing and stability they strive for.
2. Although migration is not clearly a decentralized mandate, elected local government authorities feel they have a moral responsibility concerning illegal outmigration as the people who are facing the vulnerabilities associated with it are family, neighbours, constituents, or political relations.
3. Elected local government authorities have many ideas, and in some instances have developed project proposals, about what should be done to prevent and reduce the damages resulting from illegal outmigration.
4. Elected local government, however, is neither consulted during the conception of anti-migration projects, nor do they receive associated funds (EU funds for migration).
5. Elected local government authorities' interventions in the management of the vulnerabilities associated with illegal outmigration adds to the burdens of the non-funded responsibilities they must bear.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. The next section of this report frames vulnerability as it relates to the climate, poverty and irregular outmigration. The third section places outmigration in the context of poverty and climate change or variations in the Sahel. The subsequent section, through accounts from interviewees, describes the multiple drivers of outmigration from Tambacounda to Europe. The next section portrays the position, concrete initiatives and frustrations of elected local government authorities in the management of illegal outmigration and the vulnerabilities related to it their territorial jurisdiction. The conclusion focuses on the importance of local democracy in management of outmigration and the vulnerabilities related to it, along with five main recommendations and pathways to operationalization.

Vulnerability and the migration from the Sahel: putting climate and poverty in place

Vulnerability is a susceptibility to damage (Blaikie et al. 1994; Adger 2006; Füssel and Klein 2006; O'Brien, Eriksen et al. 2007). Amartya Sen (1981), documented political-economic causes of famines in the 1970s. His work made it evident that reducing vulnerability to climate events requires an understanding of the social, political, and economic conditions of inequality, injustice, exploitation, and disenfranchisement that put people at risk. Social theories of climate crisis have since framed disasters as a result of the confluence of hazard and vulnerability (Blaikie et al. 1994); we know that without vulnerability there is no crisis (Watts and Bohle 1993; Blaikie et al. 1994; Ribot 1995, 2014). Risk reduction – the development of programmes of redress and remedy – thus requires attention to the causes of vulnerabilities within each society.

Most analyses of vulnerability or adaptation options, however, presume that the climate hazards are *themselves* the primary cause of subsequent disasters (e.g. Cutter, Boruff et al. 2003, Luers, Lobell et al. 2003, Turner et al. 2003, Eakin and Luers 2006, Sietz, Lüdeke et al. 2011) – analysts and policy makers often assume that climate drives migration decisions (Adger 2006; Füssel and Klein 2006; Freidman 2016). Moreover, this conceptual framing has led to views of risk and suffering in climate risk-prone areas as tied to events (or triggers) when vulnerability can be better seen as “slow death” (Watts 2013: xliii) or “slow violence” (Nixon 2011) – a slow attrition of the economy, health, and society tied more to governance than biophysical condition. By focusing on the climate-hazard side of risk, the widely used hazard-oriented models obscure the history of policies and practices that make people vulnerable, directing attention to superficial biophysical triggers and technical solutions. In short, vulnerability is not from the sky. It is about multiple conditions on the ground that render people precarious in the face of any stressor – climate variability and change, economic fluctuations or political instability.

Migration, often framed as an outcome of precarity but also having its own associated risks, sits at the heart of these different conceptions of vulnerability and risk. It has been conflated with “mobility” as a risk-pooling strategy (across space) to reduce vulnerability

(Agrawal 2008). Circular migration (temporary or periodic work travel) indeed plays an important role in the livelihood strategies of Sahelian families where household members support and depend on seasonal labour migrations of primarily their young men. At the same time, a more socially disarticulated form of migration occurs that is semi-permanent or permanent migration with few if any remittances and which was not supported by the family (due to the costs or risks involved). Such migration can be seen more as a schism within the family and community resulting in many cases in increased family vulnerability.⁴ Given the trauma for the migrant and family, such migration decisions are not made lightly. They often result from a sense of hopelessness driven by the migrant’s social, economic and political positions and the broader vulnerabilities to which they are subject within their home community and family. As much as poverty is a result of inadequate voice and resource access, hopelessness is connected to a sense among youth of limited voice and access to family and community resources necessary for an adequate life – and necessary for recognition or a coming of age within their communities and families.

Our research has found that those who leave their villages are typically seen as traveling along the beaten paths of migration, following in the footsteps of family and friends, near and distant relations that facilitate their migration and arrival in new areas. The literature presumes that they migrate out of desperation and toward hope (Laczko and Aghazarm 2009, Hummel 2014). The cause of this hopelessness is often attributed to the ecological conditions of the soil and rainfall or the lack of opportunities to make a living in the given landscape (Dietz, Johannes et al. 2001, UNEP 2001, Henry, Schoumaker et al. 2004, Barrios, Bertinelli et al. 2006, Warner, Ehrhart et al. 2009, Grote and Warner 2010).

4. We recognize that sometimes it is difficult to clearly distinguish what is presented as two forms of migration. Family-sanctioned migration can develop, as the migrant fails to accumulate sufficient income or creates a new family elsewhere, into a social schism.

Despite an uneven recovery of rainfall patterns regionally (rainfall has been increasing in the past two decades (Nicholson 2005; Olsson et al. 2005), we are seeing more desperate forms of migration that appear to be less part of a household strategy and more of a social schism out of deepening desperation and hopelessness. The underlying causes of these new forms of migration are rarely explained and if they are, singularly attributed to climate variability or climate change. The combination of unyielding poverty and a sense of little chance of improvement (which has a strong political component) that combined with shorter-term economic deprivation spurs the need for migration, dominates the “push” conceptions of the migration. The “bright lights” pull view also can occlude the key push factors – rebellion against unyielding and rigid and non-representative gerontocracy, inadequate schools and other social services, unfavourable economic policies, and lack of support for development.

In short, to understand migration, one needs to understand the social relations that surround rural poverty and how this affects young peoples’ sense of social injustice and their prospects for the future (Ribot 2014; Turner 2016). Therefore, we argue that reductionist thinking focused on climate and poverty alone pushes majority of international medias and journalists (Friedman in *NYT*, 13 April 2016; Taylor 2017 in *The Guardian*, 2 November 2017) and geopolitical blocs such as the European Union to consider poverty and climate as the major stressors of the vulnerability of farmers in rural Sahel, thus desiccating causal reasoning and moral responsibility.

Migration is not only driven by the immediate circumstances of the migrating individuals. It is also driven by communities and governments. We need to better understand how remittances play a role in supporting families, but also how they influence whole communities’ and their governments’ relation to migration. The remittances to Senegal reached more than 1,600 billion CFA. This is 12% of Senegal’s GDP is 8 times greater than total direct foreign investments (200 billion FCFA⁵) and almost twice Public Development Aid (one billion USD) (Coly 2017; IRDES 2013:4,8).

Does government really have a motive to stem migration to Europe and elsewhere? To what degree do elected local governments benefit from migration and in what ways? Remittances from migrants can play many structural roles. They provide revenues to government and take pressure off of government to provide employment, social protections and social services. Both areas we studied have a long history of circular migration dating back to the early colonial period and uneven patterns of development in which remittances play important roles.

The following section present the case of irregular outmigration from Tambacounda and how it relates to climate change and economic conditions.

5. Franc of the French West African community. 1 USD is roughly 575 FCFA according to the rates of BCEAO on 18 November 2018, www.bceat.int.

Emigration from Senegal: the quality of available data

The Region of Tambacounda, is located in eastern Senegal and shares a border with Mali. Tambacounda shares borders and many cultural and historical characteristics with Mali; therefore, Tambacounda is the most open region to the illegal Trans-Saharan emigration route. The Malian crisis has intensified the lack of boarder control, opening of a new route for Tambacounda migration candidates. This section presents our empirical findings from our two studied communes in Tambacounda.

The weakness and inconsistency of emigration data in Senegal

Regardless of destination, national emigration data for Senegal and other countries of West Africa are sparse, showing wide variation in the estimates for the magnitude of emigration (Ba and Ndione 2006; Lessault and Flahaux 2013; Orozco, Burgess, and Massardier 2010). Migration studies within Senegal are dominated by those within the more well-known migration source regions along the Senegal River Valley (e.g. Amin 1974, Lericoullais 1975, Quiminal 1991). Recent surveys of emigration rates in Senegal focus on urban areas (Tall 2009, Lessault and Flahaux 2013) since emigration directly from rural areas is assumed to be low. Thus, until the survey we conducted for this research, there has been little data on labour emigration to Europe from rural hinterlands such as Tambacounda.

The available data prior to our study suggested Tambacounda migration rates declined to just below the national average in 2002 with a declining importance of Europe-bound departures (Lessault and Flahaux 2013). Data from national censuses also indicated, unconvincingly, a decline. The most recent population census in Senegal in 2013 estimates that the total population that has emigrated in the last five years and is currently in Europe as 164,901 (ANSD 2013: 247). This number of emigrants, including both long-term residents in Europe and recent departures, is smaller than the 177,273 persons leaving Senegal for Europe between 1998 and 2002 according to the 2002 census (Lessault and Flahaux (2013: 72). This suggests a decline in emigration rates. Census data however do not cover illegal emigration, which is higher in

Tambacounda region than elsewhere in Senegal because of the reasons mentioned above. As will be developed below, our study seriously calls into question these data that ignore “illegal immigration” which is both cause and symptom of governments and international institutions’ limited attention to Sahelian emigration.

The magnitude of irregular emigration from Tambacounda

Our 2017 data present a starkly different picture from the 2002 and 2013 census-derived data. The table below presents results from our exhaustive 20-village survey in Tambacounda. A full 71.5% of the 1000 surveyed households have been affected by Europe-bound migration (members in Europe, repatriated from Europe, en route to Europe, or died en route), and 56.7% have at least one household member in Europe. We estimate that at least 7.9% of the population of Tambacounda are now in Europe or traveling there.⁶

6. Figures based on an estimation of the total number of emigrants in our study population of 1000 households who are currently en route or in Europe equal to the sum of the products of an estimate of the fraction of villages in each of the three categories of migration prevalence in the study area (high, medium, low), the category-specific fraction of households with at least one migrant in Europe or en route, and the average number of emigrants in Europe or en route (2) within the 186 households surveyed in more detail who have at least one emigrant in Europe or en route. This estimate is divided by the population size of the surveyed households using an average of 14.35 members (average household size in Tambacounda 2013 census) multiplied by 1000. This is most likely an underestimate given the high rates of departures and repatriations within our surveyed households.



Conducting interviews with Diallobé villagers. Photo: Papa Faye.

Table 1: Experience with migration among 1000 surveyed households in Tambacounda (2017)

Affected by emigration to Europe	71.5%
At least one member in Europe	53.0%
At least one repatriated emigrant from Europe	6.0%
At least one voluntarily returning migrant	6.8%
At least one member en route to Europe via Libya	8.6%
At least one member with whom have lost contact with (unconfirmed death or failed communication)	8.1%
At least one member who has died during emigration over last 5 years	2.0%

Our data illustrates the magnitude of the Trans-Saharan migration better than currently available annual migration rates based solely on legal migration (Lessault and Flahaux 2013) and is close to two times higher than the ballpark estimates for emigration flows (legal and illegal) used by other researchers for

Senegal as a whole (Orozco, Burgess et al. 2010). A recent report of Altai Consulting (2016), based on their previous surveys and review of studies of migration flows, cites Tambacounda as major source region in Senegal for Europe-bound illegal emigrants, followed by Kolda and Sédhiou. However, Turner and Teague (2018) note rising rates of Europe-bound emigration elsewhere in the Sudano-Sahelian region.

In Tambacounda, all twenty village authorities (seven imams and 13 village chiefs) interviewed (2017) believe that emigration grew significantly over the last 5 years – reaching much higher levels than what existed 10 or 20 years ago. They think that the opening of the Libya route and the increasing availability of buses going to Bamako, Ouagadougou and Agadez have added to the problem. Of the one hundred young farmers we surveyed, 89% say they want to emigrate and will if they can (surveys 2017). There were two reasons that the remaining 11 % did not intend to go: care taking responsibilities as the elder son of the family and lack of means. We found that single boys within families never make plans to go since they are the family's main workforce for agriculture.

Causes of emigration – experience within structure

The emigration decision must be understood by starting with the emigrant's reasons for departing. The given causes often reflect immediate experience and proximate troubles – from the hungry season to the failure of inter-aid to a new and painful social hierarchy. These experiences, however, must be placed within the political and economic constraints that produce them. The chain of causality must be drawn out from the immediate experience to the larger local, national and international context that shapes local opportunities, hopes and aspirations. In the two sub-sections below, we explore the experiences and then the political-economic forces that produce them.

Tambacounda young farmers' reasons for emigrating to Europe: complex decision-making

This section explores causes for emigration from Tambacounda as expressed in the narratives of young men, returning emigrants and their families. These narratives reflect their understanding and the immediate experiences they have of life at home. Root political and economic causes of their experience – one of deprivation and distinction – are discussed in the next section. The affective understandings that migrants have are located within a set of slow and silent structural relations and forces.

Migration as a search for resources to fill self-perceived roles and social assignments

In 2017, Among the one-hundred returned migrants interviewed in rural Tambacounda on why they decided to leave: 58% cited 'inability to support their family', 34% mentioned 'desire to get married', 15% the 'desire to build a family house', 13% 'anxiety about the future', 12% 'inability to meet their own needs'.⁷ Young men feel they have to fill these roles to acquire respect, esteem and voice within their families, and to marry. These are social roles recognized by all including their parents as illustrated by the statement of one older returning migrant:

When we were young, we did our best to support old parents until they died. I went to Gabon, to Equatorial Guinea and came back after my father died. Then I got married and departed again to Spain. I lived through many bad things I could not even say to my mother and wife. These include hunger, sleeping outside, and aggressions in Morocco along my route to Spain. I did not want to them be worried, all I wanted was to make their living conditions better: enough food, better food, a nice house, etc. After all my sacrifices, now that I have become an old man, I need someone to take the turn [to go out and support us]. That is what my sons are doing now: the eldest reached Europe last year, the other three are at home studying and doing agriculture. When he gets a job he has to help them join him.... That is how life works here!

Faye interview with Gassama, May 2018.

This quote also shows that emigrants do not reveal to their parents at home the sufferings they live through while on route to or in Europe. They rarely describe the dirty work they do while in Europe (as gardeners, housekeepers, babysitters, crop harvesters), the kind of jobs they hate doing at home. They show nice pictures of nice places on social media and are well-dressed when they come home for visits as said Cissokho, an emigrant who chose to return back home in 2009 after a long period of unemployment and suffering in Europe and who then went back again to Spain because of pressures from his own family.

7. Many gave multiple reasons; numbers thus add to over 100%.

Facebook is good but it is also bad in that people tend to share joyful personal events and news. ... They don't show themselves or their friends for examples when they are caught by the Spanish police or when you they are harvesting grapes or whatever. They would only show pictures of nice places and ceremonies, that is not their real life in Europe!

Faye interview with Cissokho, Medina Mamadou a village of Missirah, March 2017.

We surveyed 60 returning migrants in Senegal on the kind of jobs they have been doing in transit countries and in destination countries. The results were the following:

Table No. 2: Types of job exercised of emigrants

Types of job	Numbers	Percentages
Unskilled construction worker	30	50 %
Informal business	4	7 %
Bakery	1	2 %
Gardener	10	17 %
No response	15	25 %
Total	60	100 %

This table indicates the precarious jobs emigrants have held in and en route to Europe, despite showcasing wealth and joy when they visit their villages. These low-level jobs reflect the fact that the majority of the illegal emigrants from Tambacounda villages are illiterate or have a low level of education; they lack skills and cannot expect to have good and well-paid jobs in Europe as table 3 shows.

Table No. 3: Level of education at the time of departure to Europe

Types of job	Numbers	Percentages
Illiterate	41	68 %
Primary school	8	13 %
Secondary school	5	8 %
Lycée	1	2 %
Literate in Arabic	1	2 %
No response	4	7 %
Total	60	100 %

Jealousy of emigrants and a multifaceted rivalry

The hiding of emigrants' sufferings and the exhibition of the material benefits of emigration during visits back home generate jealousy of emigrants by young men remaining at home but also a climate of rivalry. Jealousy and rivalry manifest in many forms and at various levels.

Jealousy and rivalry exist within and among families. At the family level, jealousy and rivalry around emigration are exacerbated by polygamy. It is intra-family jealousy and rivalry. Wives whose sons are staying at home envy their co-wives whose sons have emigrated, so they push their sons to leave without their husband's permission. Mrs. Tandiang, in the village of Bira in the commune of Missirah explained how her 17-year son was forced to migrate in reaction to the fact that his half-brothers had been sending money only to their father to feed the family and to support their mother. Thus, her son Mamadou had to leave school after a successful exam to enter the Lycee and migrate through the dangerous journey to Europe via Libya!

Faye interview with Mme Tandiang, village of Bira, March 2018.

Inter-family jealousy and rivalry mostly occurs between families with emigrants and families without and especially around competition over the quality of houses. Jealousy also happens, to a lower extent, around the quality of the food that families with emigrants can afford. The picture below shows a nice house in the compound [a group of buildings within a fenced in area of a family] of the village chief – a compound with three emigrants to Spain – and you can see a car that one of the emigrants parked there for when he comes back on vacation.



House and car belonging to a family whose members had migrated to Spain. Photo: Jesse Ribot, 2018.

The following picture shows the house of a man whose only son died in Libya while trying to emigrate to Europe. He aspired to be like the others but consequently lost his son. He now farms alone.



House belonging to a villager whose son died in Libya while trying to make his way to Europe. Photo: Papa Faye, 2018.

There is also jealousy and rivalry among villages especially regarding the building of mosques. Sakho, a former emigrant and one of the mayors interviewed, complained about the fact that emigrants compete to build nice mosques rather than doing more socially or economically valuable investments. He illustrated this by saying that during his last visit to France, he failed to convince the association of emigrants originating from his village who live in Mante-la-Jolie [a suburb of Paris] to build a public secondary school rather than renovate the Mosque.

Faye interview with Sakho, Mayor of Koar, 2 May 2017.

Last but not least, there is jealousy and rivalry among young people, pitting non-emigrants to emigrants around marriage. Non-emigrants think that the nicest girls in the villages are marrying emigrants as girls and their parents prefer emigrants to non-emigrants. Preference for emigrants is based on the hope of emigrants having a better future than those who are staying at home as: “when an emigrant leaves his wife at home for ten years without visiting or sending her money, she will wait for him hoping for a better future. The same girl would have left long before if her husband was a non-emigrant” (Faye interview, Safalou-1, September 2017). The chief himself added that “it seems like European money has the smell of a nice perfume.” (see Ribot, Faye and Turner 2019 Forthcoming).

The development of a climate of jealousy and rivalry around emigration seems to be displacing a traditional system of solidarity and well-established relations of inter-aid among individuals within and among families. This social mechanism, or moral economy, functioned to attenuate households’ vulnerabilities to hunger in the hungry season. Now, remittances help families with emigrants to face the hunger season; households without are much more food insecure.⁸

8. Remittances increase during the hungry season. Of the 186 households that had someone who emigrated, 66 (35%) reported an increase of the remittances during the hungry season, 23 (12%) reported an increase during religious ceremonies and one family reported an increase at the start of the academic year (for registration fees and expenses). Yet the majority of the household heads, 96 (53%) did not respond or did not describe a strong seasonality of remittances.

Structural causes: public policy and the market

To understand the rationalities presented above, one needs to put them in the context of structural constraints generated by public policy and agricultural markets, which prevent peasants of Tambacounda from deriving sufficient income from their work (mainly from their more valuable crops: cotton and peanut and commodities such as charcoal), and from enjoying other social security arrangements. In short, the income from farming and forestry activities is ratcheted down for many households to near or below subsistence levels via different mechanisms in each sector. Meanwhile, health and other public services, along with long-standing moral economy relations, have been severely eroded. These mechanisms operate through the combined effect of government policies, market conditions, and local institutions.

In Tambacounda's cotton sector, poverty has been generated via credit and pricing. The credit system in the Senegalese cotton sector is unfavourable to farmers. From 1964 to 1981, *Société de Développement et des Fibres Textiles* (SODEFITEX) offered inputs to peasants with whom it has contracted. As in the peanut sector at that time, the credit was said to be free, but it was compensated through a hidden return to the state via the equipment program (in French *Programme d'équipement agricole*) from low prices paid to producers. With the New Agricultural Policy adopted in 1984, following the imposed Structural Adjustment Policies, the government stopped giving credit.

With the New Agricultural Policy, the state created the *Caisse nationale de crédit agricole* (CNCAS) – a public bank for agricultural credit – which would continue giving credit for inputs and equipment on market terms. From 1982 to 1996, SODEFITEX organized the formation of community-based cotton associations so as to better monitor credit allocation by the CNCAS whom it contracted for that purpose. During that period, SODEFITEX adopted the first form of *crédit solidaire* in which SODEFITEX guaranteed the payment of the credit to CNCAS and would establish associations of affiliate producers to pay. Due to low rate of reimbursement, the second form of *crédit solidaire*

which considered that association members are equally responsible for paying the debt, producer associations would pay for their individual members who did not pay through their federation (in French *Fédération nationale des producteurs de coton*). (Khouma 2010: 10). With that system, producers' organizations bore the risk, mainly the high rate of default, since SODEFITEX, the state and CNCAS refused to bear it.

In 1999, SODEFITEX was privatized. The *crédit solidaire* continued until the time of our interview with people at SODEFITEX in January 2018a although there were some reflections going on to change as a response to the continued disengagement of peasants from cotton production for peanut and maize (Faye and Ribot interview with Khouma, January 2018). Here again damage was already done as the amount of cotton produced in Senegal fell from 52,421 tons in 2006-7 season (Khouma 2010: 60 on annex No. 5) down to 26,565 tons in 2014 (ANSD 2018: 187).

Mr. Diallo and Mr. Ba, cotton producer organizers at Saré Elhadj explained that people abandoned cotton production for three main reasons: cotton cultivation takes longer than other crops like groundnut, the lower prices of the cotton compared to groundnut, and above all, what they called the “social mixing-up”. For the credit of the could not repay their loans was deducted from the production of other members of the association. Those who could repay had to later force the others to pay them back. Thus “villagers entered into inter-personal conflict.” (Faye and Ribot interview with Diallo and Ba, January 2018.)



Cotton producers of Saré Elhadj selling their production to SODEFITEX (Photo: Jesse Ribot, 2018).

Following liberalization of the peanut chain through the publication of Decree No.2010-15 of 13 January 2010, the Chinese begun to offer higher prices. Peanut prices reached 45 USD per sack against roughly 20 USD for the same amount of cotton in 2013 according to Mr. Cissé, a peasant at Bala. With these high prices, peasants started taking credit of seeds, pesticides and fertilizers from SODEFITEX but rather than using it for the cotton, they put most of it on their groundnut fields. (Faye and Ribot interview with Khouma, an Agro-Industrial Manager at SODEFITEX January 2018).

Following strong pressure from private peanut merchants, in 2016, the government created a new groundnut tax of about 1/8 USD (40 FCFA) per kilogram exported. The Chinese then retreated from the groundnut market while the production reached a peak of around 1,400,000 tons; so most remained unsold⁹, forcing the government to suspend the tax on 20 December 2017. Here Apart from cotton and groundnuts, charcoal is the third main source of cash for Tambacounda farmers. In this sector prices are low due to restricted access to the lucrative urban markets and control over peasant access to production by technical requirements imposed by forest agents (Ribot 1998; Faye and Ribot 2017; Faye 2006, 2017b).

In general, in the West African Sahel, “market liberalization” has generally worked against Sahelian countries and to the benefit of more powerful regional economic actors such as Nigeria with most of the meagre benefits of trade in Sahelian countries being captured by large merchants who enjoy local monopsonies in rural areas (Mamadou 1997; Trench et al. 2007).

Some well-informed farmers describe the conditions that keep the prices of local crops low. They cited the lack of processing and industrialization as Mr. Camara, a well known leader of the largest peasant organization in the historical area of Niani-Wuli, said:

Instead of selling our sesame at 400 FCFA per kilogram [about 0.8\$US] to someone who is going to add value to it and resell it at 6 to 8 \$US or even 10, we as producers could get for the kilogram at least 5 \$US. At that price we could serve many of our needs while enabling local development. We are doing the hard work for the benefit of those who have never experienced cultivating under the hot sunshine. What is true with sesame is true for peanut, fonio, maize, millet, and leaves from peanut plants.

Faye interview with Ngouye Camara, May 2018.

9. https://www.seneneews.com/actualites/levee-de-la-taxe-sur-l'exportation-dara-chides-le-chef-de-letat-exauce-le-voeux-des-producteurs-du-saloum_213726.html

On the structural cause of the precarity on Tambacounda, Mr. Kanté, one of the deputy mayors interviewed highlighted the responsibility of the state and public policy in the long-lasting precarity of farmers in Tambacounda and the rush for emigration to Europe. He pointed out remoteness and the fact the first secondary school in Eastern Senegal was completed just recently in 1977, so most people had to leave school if they could not afford to go Saint-Louis in Northern Senegal or Dakar. He also explained how unemployment was historical and relate to public policy application in Tambacounda by saying “only mining companies are present. ... The only private enterprise in Tambacounda city is SODEFITEX and it cannot hire more than ten day-workers a day. (Faye interview with Kanté, a Deputy Mayor, commune of Tambacounda).

In short, the causes and consequences of emigration may be described in terms of social jealousy and suffering, but their roots are in economic policy and exploitation. Personal aspirations and emotional sensibilities are embedded in broader structural factors that leave farmers on the edge. Clearly, single causal explanations, such as climate or poverty or conflict, are insufficient. To understand the current waves of illegal migrants fleeing toward Europe, we need a multi-causal approach that attends to experience and rationalization but places it in a broader political-economic context. It is from understanding proximate and distal causes that solutions may emerge. The next section explores the initiatives of local elected authorities in response to the vulnerabilities of Sahelian farmers and to their decisions to emigrate.

The “Presence-Absence” of local authorities in emigration issues

While elected local governments are sensitive to the vulnerabilities farmers within their jurisdictions are facing, their margin of actions seems to be limited both by the structural nature of vulnerability that go beyond their reach and the insignificance of their financial means as well as their lack of discretionary power.

Intervention of local governments in illegal outmigration, more of morality than legality

According to the law, elected local government authorities have no stated role in migration. But, two mayoral authorities told us that migration would fall in the ‘general power’ devolved to local government for ensuring socio-economic development of their commune. The nine other interviewed mayors thought migration was not among the powers transferred to the commune. This belief may be part of the causes explaining the inactivity of majority communes in the management of illegal outmigration and of the vulnerabilities related to it. Nevertheless, four out of the eleven initiated projects to retain youths in place. Mr. Sakho is a former president of the local peasant organization in Goumbayel and became Mayor based on support from the youth he had been working with. Sakho recounted his effort to bring youth back from their migration limbo:

With three of my colleagues, I decided to go to Niger and Libya to convince our youth who were stuck there in transit to Europe, to come back home. We came back with 25 youths who had originated from our commune. Prior to going to fetch them I approached FONGIP [in French Fonds de Garantie des Investissements Prioritaires] and I conceived a project of 56 million FCFA [97,391 USD] and I really believed it would get funded by CBAO. FONGIP even gave us a letter of guaranty for 70 % of the loan and the municipal council voted to fix a guaranty of 20 million FCFA [34,783 USD] should the association have problems reimbursing the bank. But when CBAO asked the commune to send the paper testifying that the 400 hectares of land the commune allocated to the association for the project, the Sub-Prefect [appointed representative of the central government] refused to approve the allocation asking the municipal council to do a feasibility study. I told the commune that I could not afford that, nor would the association be able to, having already spent 1,500,000 FCFA [2,609] for us to travel to Niger and Libya. I sent the local forest service to see whether the project site was in a gazetted forest or managed forest, they concluded that the site was entirely within the domain of the commune. They sent a report to the Sub-Prefect but he insisted he would not approve the land allocation without the feasibility study. I told him how can you block such an important project of the commune aimed at retaining the youth? Without this project they are going to depart again; most of them are calling me to request information about the project and three of them have already returned to Libya. They returned because they hoped to work on the project.

Faye interviews with Sakho, Mayor of Goumabayel, 4 May 2017.

After failing to levy funding from CBAO with the guaranty of FONGIP, Sakho decided to approach PADAER¹⁰, a six-year public project of 24 billion FCFA [41,739,130 USD] for agricultural development and rural entrepreneurship in the regions most vulnerable to food insecurity, including Tambacounda, Kédougou, Kolda, and Matam. PADAER promised to assist the 25 youths. Since January, he said sadly:

I am running after PADAER and I haven't gotten anything

Faye discussions with Sakho, April and May 2018.

While migration is not formerly identified by law as a domain of intervention for elected local governments, mayors are called upon in the many cases of death and long disappearances or feel morally obliged to assist because the victims or bereaved families are parents, neighbours or political acquaintances. In similar cases, they use their own money, social ties and political connections to assist their constituents (Faye interviews with Kanté, Mayor of Kothiary on 3rd May 2017 and with Baldé, Mayor Sinthiou Malème on 4 May 2017). Some mayors also help emigrants from their communes who reach Europe without their identification documentation – it is common that migration candidates get rid of their national identification cards when they cross the Sahara or Mediterranean so they cannot be repatriated when caught by foreign country border guards. In those cases, one of these three mayors said he produces identification documents for them when their parents call upon him for help because he does not want to be seen as a mayor who refuses to help families and constituents.¹¹

10. In French Projet d'Appui au Développement Agricole et à l'Entreprenariat Rural (PADAER).

11. We keep the anonymity of the mayor as this is an illegal way of producing ID for citizens and he could be jailed for that.

For elected local governments with no means to address day-to-day needs of their constituencies, is migration even a problem?

During this field research, local mayors were asked what budgetary means they have to exercise the powers they have been transferred. While they all said local people within their jurisdiction refuse to pay the local tax on the (minimum) rural revenue (in French *taxe sur le minimum fiscal*) and other taxes such as on property, some of mayors indicated the amount they received from the state in 2017. The table below gives an idea of weakness of the funds the local governments received from state to finance the nine domains of powers they are transferred. The Mayors of the municipalities of Kothiary, Bala and Goumbayel did not disclose their funds they received.

balance the charges related to the implementation of the transferred domains of power, the functioning of the municipal council including regular payment of honoraria (an effective salary) to the mayor and deputy- mayors, and for any other state services entrusted to the commune.

The fond de concours (competitive fund) is meant to finance equipment restricted to predetermined expenditures within the nine domains of power transferred to the commune; the funds go usually to equipment and to the education and health sectors. They cannot be reallocated from these earmarks to other priorities of the commune. They have to be returned to the state if not spent as designated in the assigned timeframe, mostly the fiscal year, according to Law No.2013-10 of 28 December 2013, article No. 197.

Tableau No.4: Data on the funds the state transfer annually to the communes

Communes	Fonds de concours (million FCFA and thousand USD) ¹²		Fonds de dotation (million FCFA and thousand USD)		Total fund received (million FCFA and thousand USD)	
	F CFA	USD	F CFA	USD	F CFA	USD
Dougué	14	24,347	17	29,565	31	53,913
Dialacoto	13	22,608	9	16,652	22	38,260
Koar	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
Koussanar	9	16,652	17	29,565	26	25,217
Tambacounda	23	40,000	9	16,652	32	55,652
Ndoga Babacar	14	24,347	18	31,304	32	55,652
Sinthiou Malème	16	27,826	18	31,304	34	59,130
Missirah	15	26,086	9	16,652	24	41,739

ND = No Data.

The *Fonds de dotation de la décentralisation* (decentralization block-grant fund) has been initiated by the Senegalese state during the second act of decentralization Law No. 96-07 of 22 March 1996 (article 59), and was later modified through Law No. 2007-07 of 12 February 2007. This fund is supported by a levy of 3.5 % on the VAT. Each year it is distributed to the communes through a ministerial decree. According to Law No. 96-07 of 22 March 1996 in its article No. 59 and Law No. 2013-10 of 28 December 2013 in its article No. 193, the money received from the fund is meant to

12. 1 USD is roughly 575 FCFA according to the rates of BCEAO on 18 November 2018, www.bceat.int.

The mayors we spoke with criticized the inadequacy of the amounts for funding of the nine domains of powers they were given, but mostly they complained about the lack of discretion in spending the monies. On the inadequacy of the funds, Dème said:

This year [2017], I had 18 million [31,304 USD] of Fonds de dotation and 14 million [USD 24,347] of Fonds de concours. Imagine 14 million while there are 30 primary schools and one secondary school in my commune of 96 villages and 15 hamlets and most of them don't even have running water. Since I was elected, I have been struggling to fix the lack of water in the schools. I need 8 million FCFA [USD 13,913] to have a single well in a school and I have to pay a VAT up to 18 %. As for the 18 million of the Fonds de dotation, after paying the honorarium of the mayor, and deputy-mayors, the driver, and the citizen identification officer, I have to provide school supplies, medications to the health district, support culture and sport associations in the 96 villages. This is why the commune cannot address the migration issue. Even in the health sector, I had to approach French partners to get an ambulance.

Faye interview with Dème, the Mayor of Ndoga Babacar, 5 May 2017.

Ba, the Mayor of Koussanar brought in the negative implications of the limited transferred funds on the image of mayors and the deterioration of the relationship between mayors and their constituencies, including a lack of trust.

Last year, it [fonds de concours] amounted to 15 million FCFA [USD 26,086]. We [the municipal council] allocated two million to renovate some classrooms and spent the remaining 13 million [USD 22,608] on digging wells. Today, the number of wells our people have requested is 40. With what we had, we could not even deliver more than three – the price is roughly 5 million depending on the depth, [which also

depends on the zones within the communes]. ... You don't even know where to start and you end up being accused of favouring some villages over others based on political relations.

Faye interview with Ba, Mayor of Koussanar, 9 May 2017.

Mr. Baldé, the Mayor of Sinthou Malème underlined the lack of discretion they are confronted with when it comes to spending the few funds they receive annually from the state. On that, he said:

I was given 16 million [USD 27,826] for Fonds de concours and was asked to build classrooms. I have 87 villages in my commune, how many classrooms can I build with that sum? You are told where to spend all the money you are given.... If you do not obey, they will investigate and accuse you of misusing the money and you are good for jail. ... I tried to allocate money to outreach to youth on the dangers of illegal migration this year, but the Office in charge of local government [Direction des Collectivités Locales] disallowed that this was legal and I had to re-allocate.

Faye interview with Baldé, the Mayor of Sinthiou Malème, 4 May 2017.

Both funds are earmarked and neither the Mayor nor the municipal council has discretion over their spending; the money has to go where the state wants it to go and in a specified timeframe under predetermined technical conditions. These restrictions turn elected local government into an administrative body for implementing central-government priorities – rather than a democratic institution built to respond to the needs and aspirations of the people. Clearly, elected local governments have no means to play a role in the management of the vulnerabilities related to illegal outmigration as it is not imposed as a central government priority. Instead, they face unfunded and underfunded mandates as well as a command and control set of line ministries. Their ability to respond to local needs, along with their legitimacy, is undermined.

Mayors are not opposed to migration as a social practice or human option. None of the mayors interviewed is against outmigration, instead, they are firmly opposed to the illegal version of it, especially across the Sahara and Mediterranean. Mayors oppose illegal migration because the dangers are many and the risk of death and disappearance is high. Some mayors provided data on the magnitude of death from illegal emigration in 2016, the year before interviews. The six mayors who provide figures reported a total of 47 deaths with a high of 10 deaths in each of the communes of Dougué, Dialacoto and Bala. Other mayors said they did not have the exact figures as it is difficult to distinguish between death and long disappearances with many families refusing to believe their people have died, hoping to hear from them again. Mayors also complained that most of the youth do not reach Europe and stay in the Maghreb;

They fail to arrive in Europe but they refuse to come back, they cannot send remittances while their families no longer have enough young men to work in the fields"

Sylla, Mayor of Missirah, 15 January 2018.

Anti-emigration projects in Tambacounda that circumvent local governments

When asked about the potential alternatives to the dangerous and risky current practice of illegal outmigration, most of elected local government authorities had clear ideas of where the money to fight the phenomenon should go. Nevertheless, they are rarely consulted by NGOs or by government institutions intervening in the migration sector. Elected local government authorities' ideas to stem illegal migration basically converge towards modernized agriculture and pastoralism in the region (9 out of the 11 interviewed). Like Sakho the mayor of Goumbayel whose case was already described above, Ndiaye, the mayor of Dougué, has a project on agriculture. His commune has allocated 100 hectares of land since 2007 for a modernized agricultural project but he is still searching for a donor to finance the required irrigation facilities and equipment. He does not want foreign agribusiness

investors, as he thinks they will just keep the land and never really invest. He believes in projects based on partnership between communes and donors, which he thinks is more likely to impact youth employment and retention of benefits for local development

Faye interview with Ndiaye, Mayor of Dougué, 6 May 2017.

Only two of eleven mayors cited professional training of youth as an option. Those two were the mayors of Missirah and Koar where an EU-funded anti-emigration program was just launched by *Volontariato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo* (VIS) at the time of the interviews.

One of the interviewed mayors criticized the training orientation of NGOs that are implementing projects aiming at reducing emigration from Tambacounda to Europe. He fears that, once an important number of young men will be trained, they won't be able to make a living from their skills since there are not enough jobs for them in the local market. (Faye and Ribot interview January 2018). Indeed, those with skills and no place to apply them may be more likely to try to emigrate. As youth and mayors told us, there are "more mechanics than cars" and too many tailors (interviews 2017-18). The trained youth would need to emigrate to use their new skills.

Ribot, Faye and Turner 2019[forthcoming].

All the mayors interviewed felt they had no voice and no role in national projects being implemented in Tambacounda to stem emigration. Projects only approached mayors when they needed the commune to allocate land or when there was a workshop to share their plans. While all the mayors interviewed preside over communes with many young men recently repatriated from Libya, they did not even know that there was an assistance office for the repatriated.¹³

13. This Office for Assistance, Orientation and Follow up (*Bureau d'assistance, d'orientation et de suivi* or BAOS) was created by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Directorate of the Senegalese living Abroad (*Direction des Sénégalais de l'Extérieur*), in partnership with the International Organization for Migration.

According to mayors, international and Local NGOs committed in projects to curb emigration, like government institutions, also circumvent elected local governments and only approach them when they meet some practical problems arising from the implementation of their already established projects.

These are the typical examples of the frustrations and shame local government authorities are facing with regard to migration and other vital sectors of rural life. They do not have sufficient means to be responsive or bring their initiatives to life. While there is lack of sufficient transfer of funds from the state, mayors are unable to mobilize loans from the bank credit system due to guaranty requirements. Full exercise of the powers they are transferred are also constrained by local appointees of central government, such as Sub-Prefects, interference in the name of legal control [the Sub-Prefect's job is to insure mayors act within the law] as in this case of land allocation process described above were abusively constrained despite being legal.

Based on the inability of mayors to respond to the social demand of their constituencies, and the roles remittances are playing for families with emigrants, why would a mayor even oppose emigration or even try to stop outmigration flows? Emigrants are even joining together to realize meaningful public investments in the domains that local governments would normally take charge, such as building public primary schools and healthcare infrastructures or equipment and supplies for education and health. While there is no fiscal return from remittances to the communes, local governments benefit from outmigration indirectly through similar investments via similar investments. Migration is more an opportunity for elected local governments to attenuate their inaction and weakness with regard to the filling of the needs and demands of their constituencies rather than a problem in itself.

Conclusion: local government and emigration from Tambacounda

Decentralizing states grossly underfinance services they transfer to elected local governments (Fall 2010, Zaki 2013). Line ministries systematically keep control over the legally transferred resources and decision-making powers (Ribot and Larson 2012, Faye and Ribot 2017). Local governments must therefore tax – and further impoverish – the poor to pay for basic services. Most poor cannot pay. They rebel and go on tax strikes. So, ‘democratic decentralization’ winds up as a central-government burden dumping exercise with a democratic patina. This patina is tarnished further by the failure of outside agencies to even consult mayors on the interventions that they impose (see Ribot 2004, Smucker, Wisner et al. 2015, Faye and Ribot 2017).¹⁴ As already established elsewhere, disarticulated interventions by NGOs in local affairs displaces elected local governments (Ribot 2002; Manor 2005) and deprives them from the means to be responsive to their citizens (Cook et al. 2017; see Hochleithner and Exner 2018a: 16-17 for examples of the negative impacts of NGOs interventions on local democracy). Further, mayors are replaced by experts and imposed external projects dressed in participatory regalia (Faye 2017b).

Young farmers, already insecure due to the breakdown of the inter-aid and social services, feel alien to the political processes of their governments and dependent on market forces. They feel no connection to their national government. The local governments also feel marginal and the majority of elected local government authorities we interviewed felt that the Tambacounda Region they are located in is discriminated against in national public policy and development-related allocations. Indeed, many people in the Tambacounda Region call the capital city of Dakar “Senegal,” as if “Senegal” were a far-off place. Farmers feel unrepresented by elected local governments who are powerless to respond to their needs. They don’t feel represented; they do not feel that they can shape the political economy and policies that are shaping their precarious lives.

Structurally, the situation is simple. Elected local governments do not have the needed resources or freedoms to carry out their mandates and, concerning

emigration, their mandate is ambiguous or at best indirect. They do have a general responsibility for local wellbeing, thus may have some justification for acting to reduce vulnerabilities that make dangerous types of emigration more attractive. External projects implemented in the local arena circumvent them in almost all domains of their jurisdiction – thus they sit on the sidelines and have little legitimacy since they cannot deliver the services their constituents need. In general, either they feel or are viewed useless and impotent (also see Ribot 2004). They are rarely consulted on emigration or vulnerability reduction programmes.

Elected local authorities are motivated to intervene in emigration to block the illegal and dangerous routes while promoting legal and safe emigration. In Tambacounda they want to prevent illegal outmigration to help youth avoid the dangers of crossing the desert and sea as well as abuses in the Maghreb. They feel a moral responsibility about the effects of illegal emigration on families, neighbours and political relations. But, they view emigration positively and not as the terrible problem Europeans decry. Emigration generates remittances for family and community and gives youth hope of marrying and of finding a role in their families, communities and in the world. As said earlier, at a higher scale, remittances represented 12 % of Senegal’s GDP in 2014 (World Bank Factbook 2016),¹⁵ so national government has reason to encourage emigration. Same for local governments whose sectors (education, health, environment and precisely waste management) also benefit directly from investments by emigrants. Therefore, local authorities are not against it – and should not be against it. They see it as an option within diversified life strategies. Their role is to make this choice a safe one and to ensure it is not forced upon people by inadequate income and food insecurity.

14. Smucker et al. Smucker, T. A., B. Wisner, A. Mascarenhas, P. Munishi, E. E. Wangui, G. Sinha, D. Weiner, C. Bwenge and E. Lovell (2015). “Differentiated Livelihoods, Local Institutions, and the Adaptation Imperative: Assessing Climate Change Adaptation Policy in Tanzania.” *Geoforum* 59: 39-50. show how climate adaptation is compromised in Tanzania by giving “local government heavy responsibilities but few resources to pursue locally sensitive development....”

15. Remittances to Senegal amount to 1.6 billion USD in 2015, ranking Senegal third of Sub-Saharan African nations in the volume of remittances after Nigeria and Ghana (Coly 2017:3).



Papa Faye interviewing villagers. Photo: Jesse Ribot.

Whether to promote legal emigration or to prevent the damages of taking illegal routes, local elected authorities have little power to intervene. They lack a clear mandate, resources, and support from outside agencies to engage directly with emigration issues. On reducing the need to migrate via poverty and vulnerability reduction, despite having the mandate, they lack the resources to make their rural areas more productive and liveable. They do not have the means to fight systems of credit, pricing, lack of processing, land privatization, and market exclusions that generate poverty and vulnerability that squash any hope of a positive future at home. Thus, irregular emigration, while risky, remains an attractive endeavour – for ordinary reasons of desired mobility and as a means to cope with the economic precarity to which young farmers in Tambacounda are subjected.

Nevertheless, the elected local mayors that we interviewed have many ideas on how to make life for young farmers more productive and secure. They know the local arena and want to develop projects

that could increase the safety and wellbeing of citizens. But to do so they will need funding from central government and intervening agents must respect their legal mandates. Even when outside of the legal mandate of the elected local governments, emigration decisions would benefit from the knowledge and legitimation that involving elected local government authorities can bring. To strengthen elected local authorities and their legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens, thus, it is important that all agencies intervening in the local arena consult and work under the authority of local government. It would provide local elected officials with greater opportunities to integrate the diverse interests of funding sources to address to more-effectively address the multidimensional problems faced in their jurisdictions. And, in the longer term, it would replace, in the eyes of the youth, ephemeral projects promoted by external agents as sources of ideas and actions to address development issues with local elected leaders who have an enduring connection to their jurisdictions. This is a source of hope.

There are many ways in which the role of local government can be strengthened. Of course, the central dilemma is that those who can strengthen them seem to have little motive to do so. The line ministries want to retain their roles as experts and as providers of services (which they often do not do). At the same time, they are happy not to have to be responsible when those services fail to materialize – which having given responsibility to the local government via the decentralization mandates accomplishes. The central government finance ministry does not have a great incentive to transfer limited funds to politically weak local authorities. Yet, strong local governments are those who can access financial resources to take hold of the powers they are transferred. Projects from development agencies and international or other large NGOs want to accomplish their narrowly stated objectives in measurable ways – such as number of hectares of forest under management or the number of wells dug or the number of schools built. They do not want to work within a local democratic process that might slow them down. Further, elected local governments are given way too many burdens without having a permanent local administrative team to be able to act effectively even if they were to magically find themselves with the funds to develop and implement desirable projects.

The effort to make both staying and emigration into safe decisions is much greater than any single agency can accomplish. There is work to be done on many fronts. The analysis of root causes of precarity are

a first step. These cannot be ignored. Poverty and its causes must be better understood and the role of policy and of practices of government and of private bodies has to be evaluated. Second, when identifying options to respond to these root causes and to other opportunities that present themselves, there is a need to consult elected local government authorities in order to make certain that observations from causal research and from other experts are indeed relevant and priority areas of investment for local people. But consultation is not enough.

Local governments need the funds to develop projects and programmes and the powers to call for or say no to interventions from on high. Many interventions are appropriately the domain of line ministries and foreign NGOs. These should be made available to the communes upon request. There is no reason that local authorities should be burdened with all aspects of managing forests or making technical decisions over schools or roads. But, there is all the reason in the world that these local authorities make the non-technical decisions that reflect the priorities of community, such as allocating rights to forest resources and deciding where to locate schools and who to hire for their construction. Many local decisions do not require technical expertise. They are effectively social and political decisions about resource and opportunity allocation and about community priorities. The line ministries must be confined to their technical support roles – but they systematically continue to act as allocative bodies.

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