



ATSAF - CGIAR++ Junior Scientists Program Final Report

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Motivation and position

My motivation to join the Junior Scientist Program (JSP) was multifaceted: 1. As there is an unequal burden of historical CO₂ emissions caused by the Global North, I wanted to write my master thesis in an existing research project in a country where the climate crisis is already more visible than in Germany while research to understand the consequences and potential solutions of these impacts are not sufficient. 2. I wanted to live and travel in an African country, a place by the sea, as I have never done. 3. I wanted to get to know the world of international research organisations and further improve my French language proficiency.

The fact that I am a white, cis-female, heterosexual individual who grew up in the upper middle class in the Global North and enjoying the opportunity to pursue a master programme in Integrated Natural Resource Management at a publicly funded university, is decisive to understand from which perspective I am writing this report. The report was written from this situation, characterised by many privileges and few experiences of exclusion and discrimination.

Research (preparation, process, content)

I got introduced to the gender focused climate security project through a PhD candidate who was teaching at Humboldt-University. As my research proposal was aligned with their research endeavour, he connected me with other researchers from the team. The research project was present in five countries with their regional offices in Kenya, Philippines, Zambia, Senegal and Guatemala. As I speak French and always wanted to travel to Senegal beforehand and as Senegal is quite stable, I chose Senegal for my research area. Until the decision was taken two months had passed as it is not easy to reach different international researchers.

Finally, my master thesis was embedded in the CGIAR research project on «climate security», investigating the relationship between impacts of climate change and conflict, violence and crime with a focus on gender and social equity. As such, the study area that I was looking at was selected based on a conflict-climate change impact index and I had the freedom to choose, based on the context and my research interest, what exactly I will be researching.

Overall, the research stay in Senegal was a very enriching experience. In order to finance this research endeavour, funding through JSP was great for me. I found the support from the JSP very helpful and reliable as they answered all questions related to the application and formal procedure to enrol for the JSP. For the time that I was working on the preparation of my study and the evaluation of the data after data collection, I could work in the office in Dakar. From the beginning on, I was warmly welcomed by the office team and my supervisor Stephanie Jaquet in Dakar. With my supervisor Stephanie we had weekly meetings to catch up on my progress. Stephanie gave me great feedback on the feasibility of certain research methods, the context and many other topics. Other colleagues in the office were very friendly, too. There were two young Italians my age and around 10 other consultants from different Western African countries, Switzerland, Netherlands and Senegal. After I visited the study site of Saint Louis for a couple of weeks to understand the context better, I adapted my research design. I tried to talk to as many local (feminist) researchers or students at the university of Saint Louis, to get feedback on my ideas for the research design. Luckily, I found a student, an activist that was engaged in environmental protection as well as feminist issues through a contact from a friend from Germany. We became good friends, she gave me feedback on the research design and she helped me to understand and put into place what I could observe in the culture of Senegal and later during the data collection. As another step of preparation, I took courses in Wolof, the most widely spoken language in Senegal, to be able to talk to and understand the fisher folks I wanted to investigate.

By creating a more participatory study, my initial research proposal and design evolved over time. It turned out that the first proposal, in which I wanted to compare geo-localised flood vulnerability with gender disaggregated socio-economic vulnerability data, was neither the most relevant nor feasible issue to research in Saint Louis. Instead it became clear after my first stay and the collection of lots of information via key information interviews, that problems were mostly related to the depletion of fish stocks, the resettlement of fisher families to camps that resemble “slums” in the inland, away from the ocean, and the corruption within resettlement projects, the sea-level rising, risks at sea, diseases and beach erosion.



As a consequence my research focus turned to an intersectional vulnerability analysis of people in the resettled site of Diougob compared to the people endangered by flooding still living on the island of so called “Langue de Barbarie” in front of Saint Louis. Using a feminist political ecology lens, everyday life was at the centre of the analysis. After discussing with my supervisor we agreed on a mixed method approach that consisted of a quantitative vulnerability survey (n=115) and focus group discussions with a social mapping exercise (3 groups consisting of 7-9 people). In the beginning I talked to many people involved in the fishery and the resettlement project to understand the context. For this I was accompanied by my Senegalese friend. With the help of her and another student from the Université Gaston Berger in Saint Louis, we then went around the two study sites to collect the quantitative data.

After that, we went to do the focus group discussion in the resettled area. The two students were very crucial as translators and facilitators from Wolof to French. We discussed the results after the data collection days together. I used the scholarship money to compensate for the work of the two students and respondents of the study. For the duration of the data collection I stayed within the fisher town Hydrobase, south of “Langue de Barbarie”.



Issues in relation to livelihood, security but also chores within the household such as cooking, washing, babysitting have been analysed and compared. In comparison, the results have shown that the resettled people, and among them young women, are suffering the most. Without running water, without electricity and being placed far away from the sea - their workplace and livelihood -, life becomes extremely difficult. As only women and children stay on the site during the daytime, there is little safety and high criminality, fights and rapes have been reported. Social cohesion has also been diminished as parts of families had to move to the resettled site while others stayed, and compassion and help for the resettled people is limited.

Overall, people suffer from decreased incomes due to overfishing and climate change which makes fish, and therefore food and income, more rare. The level of vulnerability that I witnessed within the community was severe and way more intense than I expected. As young boys start to go fishing from the age of 7-10 years old, they often lack education. As girls start to work in fish transformation or



selling, and help their mothers with house work, they also leave school at an early age. As a consequence, when there is less of the resource available that determines the culture and life of these communities - fish - , people struggle to find other livelihood opportunities. More and more people try to solve these issues, help their families, by migrating to Spain by Pirogue (a small narrow artisanal fishing boat). As a consequence, many people have died in the sea. Also fishing and the artificially opened breach south of the island pose big risks to the fishers. Most families I talked to could at least name one family member that had died in the sea.

Life, culture and language

I learned and saw a lot of new things in Senegal. The predominantly islamic country is quite open in a lot of ways, spiritual and welcoming. There are many different ethnic groups who are so rich in culture. Music, energy and dances are unique.

From my perspective, the patriarchy was very prevalent, in the form of polygyny, but also the overall disenfranchisement of women's voices. Inequality of income and wealth is extremely visible and so is neo-colonialism in every aspect of the economy and some parts of society. It struck me to see the French influence and experience the feeling of superiority of French people everywhere. As such, only speaking the colonisers' language French as a white person sometimes made me feel uncomfortable. For my study, as most fisher women I needed to talk to did not speak French but also for my own personal interest and way of discovering a new culture, I decided to invest some of my time into learning Wolof. This did change my experience in Senegal significantly, as people felt respected and were very, very open, friendly and welcoming when they heard me try to speak wolof. Also for my research this was a very good icebreaker and decreased the distance between me and the interviewees, mostly women in fishery. Furthermore, I got to know more and more Senegalese and made many friends. I strongly recommend everyone to make some effort to learn the local language, even just a few words will create a very different experience.

In general, Senegal is not a very cheap country. Public transport is cheap but chaotic. Food eaten in Senegal is mostly fish and rice (Thieboudienne) or meat and rice / couscous. For vegetarian options you cannot really eat Senegalese cuisine, or at least no whole dish. Expenses for food, apart from the national dishes, are expensive. Water and electricity cuts happen regularly but did not at all decrease my quality of life.

In the beginning I was planning to spend most of my time in Senegal in Saint Louis – the fishing village where the research took place, but the more time I spent there, the more I realised that I would have a better working environment to evaluate my data and write down my results in Dakar. On the one hand, life in Saint Louis as a white woman was sometimes difficult for me. If I wanted to leave the house this was much easier with a local friend. On the other hand, there was no office where I could work or a research team based in Saint Louis.

During my stay, there were major demonstrations and destruction of public goods happening after the condemnation of the leader of the opposition Ousmane Sonko. For a few weeks the country was first on fire, then stood still. The partisans of the opposition leader burned the university faculty of law of the university of Dakar, buses and street barricades were created around the roundabouts. The government first blocked the social media channels like whatsapp, instagram, telegram, twitter etc. and then completely blocked the mobile data connection. As these events were quite frightening, I tried to stay inside the house on these days. As a consequence, I needed to change my schedule for the fieldwork, as I could only start later, when travelling in the country became safer again.

Overall, I really grew with the opportunity of doing research in Senegal and want to recommend it to everyone who feels like this is the right thing to do. The experiences I made really extended my perspective on research but also the world as a whole. I learned many new things and made many friends. Thus, I am very grateful for the experience that was made possible thanks to JSP of Arbeitsgemeinschaft für tropische und subtropische Agrarforschung (ATSAF).

