

As of now, we are stakeholders in local governance

11

by THE YOUNG PEOPLE FROM LOUGA, SENEGAL
with SERIGNE MALICK FALL

Introduction

We are young people from the Louga region in northern Senegal.¹ In 2009, we benefited from a project which gave us the opportunity to organise ourselves and gain the necessary skills to effectively participate in local governance. As a result, and with some effective advocacy work carried out with duty bearers, we now participate in our communities' annual investment planning sessions.² Prior to these meetings, we carry out a thorough analysis of our priorities. These are then validated by our peers, who have designated us as their representatives.

This is a real revolution because, before, we were not a part of anything. Everything was done without us, even when the problems directly concerned us: such as child protection, education, health and sport.

Today, we are successfully integrated in a world which, until now, was reserved exclusively for adults. The new skills we

have gained mean that we get more approval and more consideration. The most important thing is that we, ourselves, have been qualitatively transformed by this change.

Now that we have earned our place, we intend to continue the fight to sustain and strengthen it. We have got the determination and the skills to do this, and, at the moment, the duty bearers' attitudes are favourable. Now all we need to do is maintain and develop what we have learnt. We rely on our partners and duty bearers to help us.

Who are we?

We are 37 young Senegalese citizens (14 girls and 23 boys) from the Louga region in northern Senegal which is 70 km from St Louis, the former capital. We live and study in two rural communities called Niomré and Kelle Guèye.³ We represent all the young people who belong to child-centred

¹ See notes at the end of this article.

² For a definition of duty bearers, see glossary (this issue).

³ A 'rural community', in Senegal, is a collection of several villages situated in the same eco-geographic area.

Box 1: How did we write this article?

This article was written in collaboration with 37 young people from the Louga region in Senegal. Their co-author, Serigne Malick Fall, a consultant for Plan Senegal, coordinated a two-year governance project which gave young people the opportunity to actively participate in local governance in their different communities.

The article for this special issue of *PLA* on youth and participatory governance in Africa was produced in several phases. Following a call for papers by IIED, Plan and IDS in late 2009, I (Serigne Malick Fall) visited the field to tell the young people about the writing project and to identify with them the exact experience they wanted to write about. Once this was done, I wrote the abstract that was then submitted to the editors. When the abstract was accepted, I went back to the young people and agreed with them on how the article would be produced. Following this, I set out eleven questions which would help the young people to write – this was the outline for the article which was then sent to the editors.

We held two writing workshops with the young people, one in each community – Kelle Guèye and Niomré – and filmed them. During these workshops, the young people:

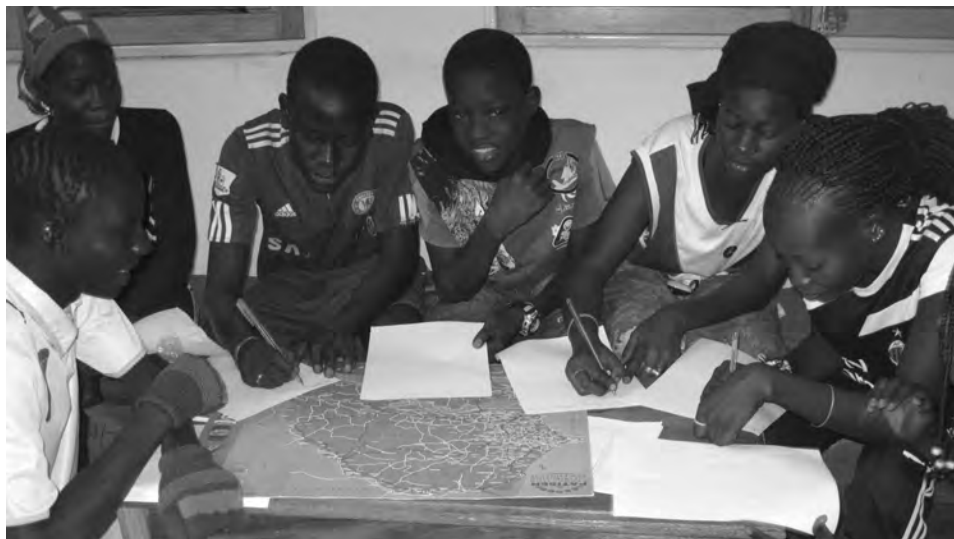
- each chose the question that they wanted to respond to;
- worked individually to reply to their chosen question;
- worked in small groups, depending on the question; and
- reproduced, in plenary, their group work.

Their writing was then aggregated into two documents by 'youth champions' acting on their behalf. Using these two documents as a base, I produced the first draft which was sent to the editors. The first draft was also sent to the young people. I also gathered their feedback on the next draft soon after the writeshop.

As the adult who accompanied the process, at the end of this article I offer some critical reflections on the changes brought about as well as the sustainability of the project.



Planning our priorities during the workshop.



Prioritising what we want to write about in our article.

Photos: Plan Senegal



Our first session of the Plan Senegal school and local governance project that we re-christened Project *Liggèyyal Sa Bopp* – or, in Wolof, ‘To work for oneself’.

community organisations in 88 villages. Every community has a federation of child-centred community organisations and we are members of the Niomré and Guèye federations.

Between 2009 and 2010, we benefited from a Plan Senegal school and local governance project, the Governance Programme Partnership Agreement, which we have re-christened *Liggèyyal Sa Bopp*. In Wolof, this means ‘To work for oneself’ – because of the central position we were given in its implementation.⁴

This project has helped us to participate effectively in the management of our schools and local governance through our participation in community development planning.

How are we organised, and why?

We have formed groups of children/young people. We have divided each of our rural communities into zones, each with a board of children/young people. Our presence on these structures has allowed us to educate our parents on the protection of the rights of the child and to participate in making policies which concern us.⁵

The *Liggèyyal Sa Bopp* project emphasised the need ‘to increase the participation of young citizens, and their organisations, in the process of evaluation, planning, implementation and control of resources and services’.⁶ Without a doubt, this project’s greatest innovation has been the creation of school councils, which provide a space for training, meeting and action. They provide a framework for us to take responsibility and launch independent initiatives to serve our schools. With the school councils, our associative system has been considerably strengthened. Now we have a space exclusively reserved for us in the school framework – under the gaze of the Head of the establishment and the teachers, who, until now, had exclusive control of school management.

The school council is lead by an executive office of six young people (three boys and three girls) democratically elected by the class delegates (of which there are four to five per class) in a general assembly. It also contains at least three separate committees which are responsible for different tasks within the day-to-day running and management of the school,

⁴ Wolof is one of Senegal’s national languages.

⁵ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a legally binding international instrument that Senegal ratified in 1998. The CRC recognises the human rights of children, defined as persons up to the age of 18 years. For more information see the glossary (this issue) and: www.unicef.org/crc

⁶ Objective 3 from the *Liggèyyal Sa Bopp* project.



Photo: Plan Senegal

Making an action plan for our school.

such as asset management, health, environment, hygiene and sanitation, sports and culture etc.

School councils have been crucial both in strengthening our participation in school management and our involvement in our local planning development committees. They provide a framework for us to be trained in planning, management and the control of goods and services delivered to schools. Because of these new skills, we now manage all our school assets as well as a part of the financial support granted to school projects. We also formulate action plans to improve our environment and learning conditions.

These are welcome and unexpected changes for children/young people, which previously we had never dared to hope for, because of adults' deep-rooted habits that effectively marginalised young people.

From marginalisation to participation: how was change brought about?

Previously, although we were organised into child/youth groups, we didn't know what took place at the Rural Council, or how things worked there.⁷ In effect, although our rights had been promoted and protected for several years, our right to participation was relegated to the background. For a long time, our parents had limited it to activities that didn't compromise their power: for example, helping to vaccinate our little brothers or registering them for school, obtaining birth certificates for them etc.

It took the launch of the *Liggèyyal Sa Bopp* project for us to really benefit from our right to participate. This change was achieved through a combination of factors:

- successfully raising the awareness of our parents and duty bearers; and
- building our capacity as young people in

⁷ On its administrative map, Senegal is subdivided into 14 regions, 45 departments, 117 arrondissements (administrative divisions), 150 communes (the lowest level of administrative division) and 353 rural communities.

areas such as planning our priorities, managing goods and services, holding meetings and monitoring our action plans.

How did we build our capacity to participate?

We needed several training sessions to gain confidence and to feel capable of competing with adults in domains that, previously, they occupied exclusively. Modules developed for us by youth champions (teachers and young people who had already received training) focused on the following skills:

- planning priorities, translating them into activities and correctly budgeting for them;
- managing and controlling the quality of goods and services;
- managing and generating financial resources;
- conducting meetings; and
- producing a newspaper.

Once we had acquired these skills, we were able to hold our own community planning workshops. This work allowed us to be officially recognised by, and participate in, operational planning workshops organised by our respective rural councils.

How do our planning workshops work?

The first stage of preparation for our planning workshops is always to inform the President of the Rural Council. Once we have his approval and commitment to the workshop, we begin our basic activity by planning at the 'zone' level: each of the four zones discussed above sets out its priorities and chooses a delegation to represent it at the community workshop. These delegates are then called to the Rural Council headquarters for the planning workshop. We hold the meetings in the Rural Council's discussion chamber, which gives our work the official 'seal of approval'.

We begin a meeting by introducing ourselves, and then setting out some rules to



Photo: Plan Senegal

Continuing our discussions outside under a tree.

ensure a productive meeting, after which we rigorously follow twelve stages (see Box 2).

How have we ensured that our priorities are included in the community annual investment plan?

The children/young people's action plan is presented at the annual rural community investment planning workshop, which is a decision-making space for adults. This meeting is convened by the President of the Rural Council, in the presence of the administrative authority, technical partners and NGOs. During this meeting, the children's priorities are integrated with the adults', according to their relevance to the programme objectives. Acceptance of the children/young people's priorities is generally easy, because, in the almost unanimous opinion of the participants:

The children/young people plan for everybody: women, children and men.⁸

What activities have we carried out, and how?

The results recorded to date are extremely encouraging. As well as the activities we previously carried out (raising environmental awareness, advocating for birth

⁸ Quote from the President of the Niomré Rural Council, at the annual investment planning workshop, Louga, August 2009, with the participation of a large delegation of children/young people and in the presence of all the rural council presidents of the department, the Prefect and technical representatives of the Senegalese State.

Box 2: Planning workshops

Stage 1: Every participant tells a story that has affected them.

Stage 2: Individually, we try to identify the problems one by one that have emerged from the different stories.

Stage 3: Using drawings, we try to identify all the different problems affecting us, whether these are at school or in the community.

Stage 4: Consolidation of the problems:

- Drawings are put up and commented on.
 - We group ideas that go together, even if they are depicted slightly differently.
 - Two volunteers (one girl and one boy) try to classify the pictures.
 - The problems are named, based on the drawings.
 - We then choose by consensus the problems which are our priority, using a preference ranking method.
- To take into account the age of the participants, we often use a role-play activity to establish our priorities. This means that everyone is able to offer their perspectives and preferences without feeling manipulated.

Stage 5: In small working groups, we try to present solutions to each problem using pictures.

Stage 6: The proposed solutions are rewritten on flipchart paper and stuck on the wall.

Stage 7: For every solution found, we set out the activities that would allow us to implement it, including the actors, the timeframe and the budget.

Solutions	Activities	Actors	Timeframe	Budget

The budget section is only filled in after retrieving information from the relevant actors.

Stage 8: We put monitoring mechanisms in place, using the following question: what proves to us that the activity has been carried out?

Activity	Proof that it has been carried out (indicators)

Stage 9: We collect the budgetary information, which means retrieving information from people about how much each part of the activity will cost.

Stage 10: We process the data we have gathered: a small group of four children/young people (two girls and two boys) is in charge of adding the budgetary information to the activity table.

Stage 11: We vote on the budget like this:

- The solutions are set out on different coloured pieces of paper.
- Two volunteers are designated to count the votes.
- The solutions are classified according to the number of votes they receive.

Stage 12: We put in place a monitoring committee: four children/young people (two girls and two boys) are voted to represent us on the Rural Council. Their role is to:

- monitor the implementation of our action plan;
- with the Rural Council, verify the execution of the activities including quality control; and
- report back on the project to the group.

After monitoring the project for three months, the monitoring committee has to answer the following questions:

- What worked well?
- What did not work well?
- What should we improve next time?

To do this, they have to fill out the table below:

Activities	Proof that the activity has been carried out	What worked?	What didn't work?	What needs to be improved?

Photo: Plan Senegal



Children in Senegal raising a flag that they helped to restore.

registration, school enrolment etc.), we are now working in new areas such as:

- making inventories of school property;
- requesting access to information (including prices) on the supplies and materials destined for use in our schools;
- ordering, receiving and managing the supply of goods and services necessary in our schools;
- budget management for varied and complex activities such as school fairs, sports/cultural competitions, the purchase of school supplies; and
- implementing community action plans alongside other youth associations in our communities.

What impact have the activities had on children/young people and the community?

Due to the increased capacities we have demonstrated, adults now perceive us much more positively. We are considered just as capable as them of identifying solutions to the issues faced in our community, especially issues related to the promotion,

protection and realisation of children's rights.

We are now accepted, and even actively invited, into decision-making spaces that were previously exclusively occupied by adults. We are participating in the development of different sectors of our communities, expressing ourselves and giving our opinions on everything.

Our participation in activities which develop our communities at grassroots level makes us feel more responsible, confident and trusted. The skills we have acquired and our achievements have empowered us and given us confidence. We express ourselves better in public and feel as though we are better trusted in different situations. We now have skills and knowledge of subjects where adults often lack understanding. Moreover, by organising our own planning workshops, we have acquired life skills which are essential for our society. Presenting our action plans allows us to communicate with adults and help people of different ages to work well together in community decision-making

Box 3: Learning by doing and the African child

In *L'Enfant Noir*, Camara Laye (2000) brings 'learning by doing' to life by describing the relationship between a son and his blacksmith father. Pierre Erny (1990) in *L'enfant et son milieu en Afrique Noire*, also aims to illustrate how, throughout his life, the African child learns alongside his elders whose responsibility is to 'pass on the heritage of past generations'. Historically, the African child developed by following his parents and working alongside them. The presence of young people alongside adults was an invaluable way to learn to face their individual and collective social responsibility. These values have faded over time but we hope that they will be revived by activities like these.

spaces, which, before, were exclusively occupied by adults. We are also well integrated within the teams which monitor and evaluate these planned activities. This gives us the opportunity to develop good governance skills from an early age.

In fact, our everyday behaviour has already changed. As a community representative testified:

The pupils' demonstrations (strikes, sit-ins, marches) were, until now, bordering on vandalism, but since young people have participated in local governance processes, we haven't seen any damage or destruction of public property on their part.

What impact has this had on duty bearers?

For duty bearers – for local authorities, parents, representatives of State services and community structures – this experience has been an opportunity for them to gain more credibility in the eyes of children and young people. By working with young citizens in decision-making spaces, duty-bearers want to be seen as more credible and transparent in managing community development activities. Adults are now learning to pass on their knowledge and skills to young people, using educational and training methodologies that, as in the

past in Africa, focus on 'learning by doing' (see Box 3).

What about tomorrow (perspectives)?

We know that it's easier to create change than to sustain it. We could say that the hardest is yet to come. However, we have now learnt the essentials: we know how to organise ourselves and form networks with other children/young people. We have acquired technical skills which, despite our age, put us at the same level as adults. This means that we are now perceived as 'partners' that local authorities can call on to ensure that local planning is done according to our social and economic needs, using a rights-based approach.⁹ Better yet, we know what we want and how to get it. We want to improve the quality of our education. We need libraries and leisure facilities in schools so that we can spend more time there doing extra-curricular activities, rather than at home where we (especially girls) are inundated with domestic work.

Finally, we want to continue to benefit from projects at our level, so that we can use our newfound skills and gain further skills in our work alongside adults.

We are going to share and transfer our new skills so that our non-school attending peers, or those whose schools were not part of this project, will also benefit from *Liggèyal Sa Bopp*.

Comment by Serigne Malick Fall, process facilitator

Some fragility is evident in the young people's writing here. We must remember that as they increase their capacity, they develop expectations. However, they also believe they owe everything to the NGO which helped them to realise their right to participate in local governance. This includes, for example, the way Plan's influence worked in their favour with adults in charge.

Nevertheless, in believing this, they are underestimating their own assets, and

⁹ For a definition of a rights-based approach, see glossary (this issue).

forgetting that they did, in fact, believe in themselves. They are also forgetting that there have always been adults who are receptive to their participation, either because of their ideological convictions or because they have first-hand experience of young people's maturity and a sense of responsibility towards them (in e.g. cultural, sporting or environmental activities). These 'youth allies' constantly remind others of the wise Wolof adage which says: 'Truth is a needle, fallen in the sand. The young person, just like the adult, can pick it up'.

Moreover, the history of development in our country reminds us constantly that training, however well-formulated, will not suffice to bring about qualitative changes. The gap between trial and transformation is often very wide, which is further proof of the merit of the young people from Niomré and Kelle Guèye.

However, the project's outcomes are still fragile, because young people haven't yet developed their own income-generating initiatives. This would reinforce their autonomy and help them find endogenous solutions to their problems. They also have

not yet realised that they are largely dependent on external funds (which come from the community or from NGOs such as Plan). This makes it absolutely vital that outputs are monitored and supported until they reach a critical mass which will guarantee their sustainability.

To do this, young people can rely on local duty bearers who are now willing to **capitalise** on what the project has already achieved. Not only do most of the rural community presidents now have the necessary skills and knowledge, but several other community groups are appropriating the approaches used by the project in collaboration with young people. This is the case in Saint-Louis, Louga and Thiès in particular. The young people at the heart of these important changes have, in themselves, definitively changed. In changing, they have **transformed** the context in which they act and completely transformed the way they are **perceived** by the adults they have **collaborated** with. In this respect, we may be sure that nothing will remain the same as before, because children/young people have acquired the means to participate fully in local governance.

CONTACT DETAILS



Serigne Malick Fall
Researcher and Consultant in
Education/Training and Governance
Cabinet Solutions Pédagogiques Pour
L'Afrique
BP 3202, Thiès
Senegal
Email: serignemalick@gmail.com
Web: <http://serignemalick.unblog.fr>



Translated by:
Sophie Bide
Assistant Programme Officer
Plan UK
Finsgate, 5-7 Cranwood Street
EC1V 9LH
0300 7779777
Email: Sophie.bide@plan-international.org

REFERENCES

- Laye, C. (2000) *L'Enfant Noir*, Poche.
Erny, P. (1990) *L'Enfant et son milieu en Afrique Noire*. Payot.

NOTES

This article is the product of a collective effort by: the children/young people from Kelle Guèye: Khady, Abdou, Amy, Amsatou, Fatim, Cheikh Ibra, Ramata, Modou, Alé, Moustapha, Ndické, Modou D, Modou G n°1, Modou G n°2, Modou S, Omar, Serigne Mbacké and Ibrahima; the children/young people from Niomré: Moustapha, Saratou, Bathie, Fabèye, Ndiogou, Anta, Samané, Fatou, Cheikh, Bogou, Arame, Fary, Ndèye Aminata, Abdoul Aziz, Macoumba, Ibrahima, Mame Khary, Mbaye, Moussa and Ibrahima D; Plan Senegal staff: Lamine Ndiaye, Samba Fatim Mbaye, Georges Kamara, Amath Camara and Daouda Diop. We would also like to thank Sophie Bide, our tireless translator.

Serigne Malick Fall is an independent consultant for the School Governance Project at Plan Senegal. For more information, you can also contact:

Plan Senegal
Email: senegal.co@plan-international.org