

Senegal

“Now this is what we are all seeking, to have our own house with our children”

Kadia joined her husband in 1970 in Belfast, north-eastern France, an area deemed as dangerous; she has yet to adapt to this new life. She talked about a situation with her husband when she visited Senegal and left their three children and only brought her 2-year-old-child. She told him: “stay with your children, they will not come with me because every time I go to Dakar you never send me enough money and it is too little to live off of. Therefore I will not bring the children.” When her children went to Senegal for the holidays she asked them to bring some administrative papers that enabled her to come back to France after taking a rest in her parents.

A Senegalese social worker in France praised Kadia’s courage and advised her to get involved within her community. She found work at the city council of Tourcoing and then quit that job to create an association whose goal was to help all migrants, regardless of their nationality. Three years ago, Kadia became ill and one of her sons asked her to move to Paris so that he could take care of her, which she did. She is proud that all of her children work and that none of them has had problems with the law.

Kadia has returned to Senegal every year but she has never invested there. She had never thought about permanently returning to Senegal; however, the current conditions, such as the cost of living and the immigration policies of France, have pushed her to do so. Like other women and children, she will invest in housing in Dakar and will rent it out in order to cover the monthly loan payments. “You must leave the custom of staying in your mother and father’s house, you must have your own house where you can return to. Now this is what we are all seeking, to have our own house with our children.”

“During the 1970s until 1980, there were no women working here. Women began to work in the 1990s. We did nothing, we were just at home. Even the bank account, we did not know what it was. Women did not even have 100 francs to send to their mothers. Men had everything. Now, we women born in Dakar have rejected this situation. We showed them that we are educated, that we have our degrees. Now they give the social aid for our children directly to us. We have to feed them, dress them and furnish their rooms. Now women have their own bank accounts. And polygamy is prohibited.”

Kadia's husband never wanted her to work, but she has always braided people’s hair in her home. For women who are over fifty years old, it is impossible to find a job. The children have grown up and they no longer receive child allowances once provided by the state. They rely primarily on the solidarity of their children. Their husbands are often older than them; they are retired and want to return to the village, where they often have a young wife. “They spend 6 months in Senegal and the woman has to manage to have enough to eat in France. You are the one to pay your bills and if you do not pay the rent, you will be thrown out of the house.”



In 2004 it was estimated that immigrant population represented 3% of the Senegalese population, among whom only 16% were women. Remittances reached 3% of the national GDP (500 billion CFA francs, or US\$1.1 billion, according to the IMF). In a country that is overwhelmingly rural (59% of the population), and impaired by poverty and drought, the organizing and solidarity efforts of all emigrants and local people, together with the individual and collective remittances, are key factors in the development of the fragile communities of origin.*
