

Senegal

“We have worked hard to get what we have and nobody can take it back except God”

Coming from Golleri in northern Senegal, in the Fouta region, Mamadou arrived by boat to France in 1965. In Paris he first stayed with 10 others in the home of someone from the Maghreb region, and later moved into a collective house for workers. He saved all year, sent money and returned to his village every year until 1977, when he decided to bring his wife to France.

Mamadou thus moved from the single life into family life in a new apartment, and this is when he started to visit Senegal less often. The work of social workers and women has inevitably shaken their values, not without resistance from men, Mamadou sees this change as inevitable: "Even if men and women are not equal, women must have a little freedom. Many people hide it, they do not want to talk about it, but it is the reality. We cannot go on just like in the village, even if we wanted it to, we cannot, especially if you live in Europe. Women will work from 6 am to 6 pm in the evening. Because women need something other than staying at home, cooking, and cleaning, etc. That stage is over."

Since he retired 8 years ago, Mamadou spends for 6 months in France and 6 months in Senegal. For the past 2 years, he has had another woman in the village. "Because I cannot stay here from the morning until the evening without working, I cannot go on like this. I also cannot stay in Senegal for 6 months without a woman. It is also not good. Now I have a woman there and a woman here. Everything is well shared."

Work opportunities were abundant when Mamadou arrived in France, particularly in the automotive sector, where he worked for 38 years. His incorporation into the French system, however, required some time. "Now France became good. Now we have our families here and we eat well. We fought to have our rights, the right to retirement pension. The jobs that the *toubabs* (native french people) refused, we have done up until we had got our rights. We have worked hard to get what we have and nobody can take it back except God. That's my long career, the good and the bad."

Mamadou has seven daughters and three sons who studied and are now working. His wife in France is working as well. For him, the moment to retire has come. "Yes, the time has come, we are forced to return because, economically, we cannot live here. This is the first challenge we are facing."

During this time, he has realized that his values do not coincide with those of his children. "Once our children got married, we wanted them to remain in the house so we can return, and for the first-born to remain in the house to manage the family. Unfortunately, the children do not share our opinion. They want their own house, they have not travelled, they were born here. They have customs from here. They will not take over family responsibilities."

As a farmer with a low level of education, he understands that his children want to construct their future in France. "If you have more than 10 children, you can't tell them to go to Senegal. What keeps you from doing that is the fact that even the people who live there such as ministers and other government officials send their children to France to study. Therefore you can't tell your children to return to Senegal because you do not have the means to send them to France from there."

Mamadou has always sent money to his wife, brothers or parents in Senegal. He has also been a member of associations, but no longer believes in such investments. "We are not educated. Those who are educated come to lead us, then they leave with the money. This has spoiled our program." He now considers that the only plausible way is through individual projects. He is also telling himself that he would have done better by investing more to prepare for his return. He currently owns two houses in Senegal, one in Dakar and the other in the village.



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.*

This Life Story pertains to the project "Gender and Remittances: Constructing Gender Sensitive Development" produced by UN-INSTRAW and UNDP, with funding from Japan WID.

*Source: Sarr Fatou (2010), Migration, Remittances and Gender: Response local development. Senegal, Dominican Republic.