

Senegal Land Grab on the Verge of Implosion

By [Grain](#)

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A new report by Italian researchers shows that the controversial Senhuile project in Senegal is on the verge of collapse. The project, initiated by Italian and Senegalese investors four years ago to produce biofuels, has provoked fierce resistance from affected communities in which six people have died. Its investors claim to have secured the rights to 45,000 hectares of land, though the company has cultivated only a fraction of this; to make matters worse, Senhuile's disgraced former CEO is counter-suing the company on a variety of charges.

Senhuile is synonymous with land grabbing in Senegal. The project has been dogged by problems since it was set up. In 2011, villagers furious with the deal granting the company 20,000 ha in Fanaye, rose up in protest. Two villagers were killed and the project was then suspended and moved to a new location in Ndiael. There, several children from the area drowned in the project's unprotected irrigation ditches, while suspicions of illicit finance rocked the company's credibility. Now, a new report by Italian researchers published by Re:Common shows that the firm's public relations efforts are backfiring and that the project is mired in deeper conflict and contradiction.

Some key findings:

- The company fired its CEO, Benjamin Dummai, who was subsequently jailed for embezzlement, but he is now counter-suing Senhuile for 14 offences including fraudulent raising of capital and money laundering.
- In recent weeks, the Italian investors have made it clear that their Senegalese land holdings go beyond the 20,000 ha attributed to them in the Ndiael region. They claim to have retained the rights to the 20,000 ha originally ceded to the project in Fanaye. They also claim to have recently acquired 5,000 ha in Fass Ngom. Yet the company has only managed to cultivate 1,500 ha in the past year, raising serious questions about why the authorities have allocated them so much land. In all areas affected by the project, the it is fiercely contested by farmers and pastoralists who can no longer make a living. Rumours abound that the project will be flipped to a major US or West African corporation.
- Tampieri has spent the last year investing heavily in public relations work to win over the hearts and minds of local villages around the project site. Yet visits with the communities show the stark contradiction between what the company says and the experiences of people on the ground, exposing the company's corporate social responsibility agenda completely hollow.
- The project's worst offences are the real human suffering and loss of life. Last month, a 16-year old herder drowned trying to cross the company's irrigation canal and the family is preparing to file suit. The company has also been laying off workers and dismisses the demands of the 37 villages surrounding its project to pack up and go home.

“Whatever your position on development or management of land resources, we can’t keep on telling people what’s actually going on on the ground and presenting evidence of the company’s irregularities, while all it does is deny and attempt to cover up the divisions, contradictions, and conflicts surrounding the project. There’s been open conflict around this project for five years. It can’t go on like this,” said Davide Cirillo, a researcher with WOTS? (Walking on the South), an Italian collective that has done a great deal of work with the Senegalese communities.

This report is being launched jointly by the Collective for the defence of Ndiaël and Re:Common, in cooperation with [GRAIN](#), [Investigative Reporting Project Italy \(IRPI\)](#), [SUNUGAL](#), and the [Walking on the South](#) collective, groups that have been working to expose the Senhuile project as illegitimate and harmful.

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