

Living Next to Nothing in Senegal's Drought-Hit Region

LWF and Local Church Assist Families

FATICK, Senegal/GENEVA, 4 May 2012 (LWI) – Residents of Fangad village in southwestern Senegal have been living off the beautiful but austere land for generations, always knowing it to be the safest of employers. But things are changing in the Fatick region.

The sparse rainfalls last year meant there was no harvest, no food and no income. Families are struggling to feed themselves.

“It is as if you would go to the bank and find that someone had taken your salary and all your savings. We are left with absolutely nothing. It is a catastrophe,” says Mohomo, who works for the Lutheran Church of Senegal (ELS), a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member church that is assisting community members in the midst of the devastating situation.

Fatick, home to 613,000 people, is part of the Sahel region threatened by drought and desertification. The vast majority of the people here earn their living as pastoralists and from fishing.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) describes the situation as a new food and nutrition crisis that is affecting millions of people across northwest Africa.

Due to a combination of drought, high grain prices, decrease in remittances, environmental degradation and displacement of populations coupled with chronic poverty and vulnerability, more than 16 million people currently are facing food insecurity and over 1 million children under the age of five are at risk of severe acute malnutrition. In Senegal, 850,000 people are affected in a population of more than 12 million.

No Water for Pastoralists

In Fangad, the people live off nature. Work is all about harvesting from the land and what the animals can produce. Rice, peanuts, millet and maize are grown for domestic use and to be sold at the market. Herds of goats and cows as well as poultry and pigs are raised to feed families and for income.

When the rains come, the land yields enough for everyone and there is still some to sell on the market.

In a normal year, rainfall measures about 700-900 millimetres, but last year there was less than half of that. Figures from the World Food Program indicate a deficit of more than 30 percent in cereal production this year. In Fangad that means empty food shelves.

Diomaye Farr, whose great-grandfather founded the village, says he is afraid that all the young people in the village will leave. “Now it is all dry, the little water we can get is too salty and we have nothing to harvest,” he adds.

“Men and women have to walk a long way to try and get a job and an income in Mbour city. We have almost nothing,” he laments.

Diago Farr, 60, says his life is hard. He lives with his five children, a grandchild and a daughter-in-law. Two years ago he had no worries. He lived a perfect life, he recalls. Today he has nothing. While he returns to his plot of land every day, the soil remains dry and yields nothing. “We need help now,” Diago says. “The situation is getting out of hand very quickly.”

Local Government without Resources

Ibrahim, who works at the local government office and is one of two staff members in the Fatick region delegated to take care of all public business, says he feels dejected.

“There is absolutely nothing,” he says.

“We have too much work, too few staff and very little money.” Ibrahim says there is not much he can do to help, other than give some food for the day but he knows it does not go very far.

Ibrahim can only confirm what those in Fangad say. “People have nothing due to the drought. Women and men leave their homes to look for work in the city. And that is dangerous business, especially for the women,” he maintains. Too many women end up in sex work, he adds.

Easing the Burden

Global church partners are acting to ease the drought’s impact on families in the Fatick region under an appeal for Mauritania and Senegal through the global emergency network ACT Alliance, of which the LWF is a founding member.

Rev. Pierre Thiam, president of ELS, says there is much to do. “We can provide money, food and accompany the villagers to the market to assist them with transportation.”

But the Lutheran church leader agrees that these are only stop-gap measures. The next step is to help people cope with recurrent droughts on their own.

The ELS drought relief intervention will assist 10,131 people in Senegal. The church will provide USD 40 in cash transfers to each of the 1,447 households for at least three months and train 40 women in the preparation of enriched food to be distributed to 1,013 people.

Households will receive eight tons of enriched food every month, or almost eight kilograms per person, per month. Farmers in 260 households will get agricultural tools, seeds and animal fodder. The church-led project includes training of 25 community members in cultivating drought resistant crops. (844 words)

(Written for LWI by Thomas Ekelund in Fatick, Senegal)

Read more about the LWF’s response to the food security crisis in the Sahel region:

<http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/tag/sahel-crisis>

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(The LWF is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. Founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden, the LWF now has 145 member churches in 79 countries around the world, representing more than 70 million Christians. LWF acts on behalf of its member churches in areas of ecumenical and interfaith relations, theology, humanitarian assistance, human rights, communication and the various aspects of mission and development. Its secretariat is based in Geneva, Switzerland.)

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