

## Chronic poverty in Senegal



### Key points

- Chronic poverty in Senegal is widespread and living conditions continue to deteriorate, with repercussions for future generations. Poverty is experienced for long durations throughout the life-course, with few changes to poverty status through different life-stages.
- Chronic poverty in Senegal is not irreversible. Inclusive growth (putting the poor and the middle-classes at the centre of wealth production and sharing; sustainable economy); human rights; open governance; geographical balance; and upward social mobility must act as the guiding principles of anti-poverty policies.
- Geographical setting and education are important, as poverty is predominantly concentrated in rural areas and experienced by people who have not received an education. Efforts must be focussed on developing human capital, agricultural investments, investing in areas with high employment potential, and improving food security - particularly in rural areas.
- Education, particularly post-primary education, is critical to enabling exit from poverty. There is a need to reform the public school system to provide quality education and greater accessibility. A child protection strategy is also essential.
- Social support networks enable poor families to survive, but are not sufficient to help exit poverty. Support from central and local government must complement community support mechanisms in a way that is targeted, structured, and inclusive.
- Policies must be coherent and focus on cross-sector integration, and on the development of economic clusters. The Senegalese Government must learn from, and link with, successful initiatives led by other stakeholders.



## Introduction and research method

This Policy Note draws on the key research findings and policy messages of a 2008/09 study entitled *The Dynamics of Poverty in Senegal: Chronic poverty, transitional poverty, and vulnerabilities*. The study was conducted by the Research Laboratory on Economic and Social Transformation (LARTES-IFAN) with support from CPRC, UNICEF, IRD, and the Senegalese Ministry of Family and Early Childhood. The study captured 80 years of Senegal's social history through its research participants, and analysed how people enter, remain in, and exit poverty.

A two-pronged research approach was utilised in this study, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data collection involved a household survey conducted in 2008 using a sample of 1,200 households representing three strata of the population. Overall, 10,104 individuals were surveyed. This was followed by a qualitative biographic survey carried out in 2008/09 with a sample of 2,400 individuals drawn from the household survey, representing the head of house and the principle breadwinner. Qualitative data collection involved 100 stories on the inter-generational transmission of poverty, 100 stories on the evolution of family structures in the context of chronic poverty, and 100 stories on relationship networks. The results provided a picture of the context of poverty in households for 2008/09 and poverty dynamics in Senegal.

## Key research findings

Chronic poverty has marked the past 80 years of Senegal's social history, and is widespread, with the chronically poor outnumbering both the transitional poor and non-poor. This poverty profile finds that the majority of Senegalese households are poor or vulnerable, with 60 percent of households living in poverty. Moreover, living conditions continue to deteriorate, carrying potential negative repercussions for future generations. Vulnerability to chronic poverty is exacerbated by shocks or disasters – such as loss of harvest, conflict, theft, flooding, divorce, loss of spouse, and/or loss of capital.

Poverty in Senegal is experienced for long durations throughout the life-course, with few changes in one's poverty status through the different life-stages. In other words, many people who were chronically poor at one life-stage, remained so at

the next (i.e. early childhood and youth, youth and adulthood, adulthood and old age), showing little room for mobility within the poverty spectrum and the dominant presence of chronic poverty in each stage of an individual's life overall. However, young people face an increased chance of exiting poverty in this life-stage, while the likelihood of escaping poverty decreases as people get older – with older women less likely to live in chronic poverty than their male counterparts.

Poverty in Senegal is disproportionately experienced by members of ethnic minority groups belonging to all ages. Members of the Wolof community, for instance, seem to have access to more opportunities and are less likely to slide into chronic poverty, as compared with an 83 percent risk faced by a Pulaar or a Sereer, and an 80 percent risk faced by a Dolar individual. Poor geographical location and lack of education correlates to poverty; poverty is predominantly concentrated in rural areas and experienced by people who have not received an education. Moreover, almost 75 percent of rural households are chronically poor, with only 18 percent never experiencing poverty. By comparison, more than half of the households in the capital city have never lived in poverty, while 27 percent of households live in chronic poverty. The majority of people who have never experienced poverty (66 percent) are geographically concentrated in Dakar.

Chronic poverty in Senegal predominantly affects those who have not had access to education, and a lack of education significantly exacerbates vulnerability to poverty. Eighty-four percent of chronically poor people have not received a school education, with 42 percent of those in transitional poverty also lacking education. Education, particularly post-primary education, is vital in enabling an exit from poverty. The study found that more than half of those who had exited poverty have benefitted from some level of education, while 70 percent of those who had never experienced poverty are educated – with 38 percent having attended secondary school and beyond. Interestingly, children brought up by people who have no education are more vulnerable to poverty.

There are also clear links between poverty and child-labour in Senegal. Children from nearly five percent of poor households and seven percent of the most vulnerable households work in the informal sector. Children are forced to drop out of school and prematurely enter the informal economy in order to contribute to household financial resources. This is



a coping mechanism adopted by poor households which ultimately has detrimental repercussions for children's poverty-status in later life. The study further finds that children are increasingly left in the care of people out of the immediate family, which entails concerns for their protection and well-being. Efforts to tackle chronic poverty must thereby target young people (paying specific attention to children) and rural populations (including those living in the outskirts of cities), and building social capital at an early age is imperative to alleviating chronic poverty.

Social networks function as important mechanisms of support in the face of poverty in Senegal. The composition of households in Senegal is complex and largely reflects extended family ties. Households tend to be large, and the majority (57 percent) include more than one family unit. Expenses are generally shared between several members of the household, with two to five individual breadwinners per household at a national level. Female-headed households are also on the increase, particularly in urban areas. For example, in Dakar, four out of 10 households are headed by women, as opposed to rural areas where this figure is one in every 10 households. Overall, women headed a quarter of all households surveyed in the study.

Resource-sharing functions as an important security-net. For example, 'satellite households' see married sisters share the kitchen of their mother's home, which is similar to having a collective kitchen with separate residential quarters. Many people are reliant on social connections to access employment; however, this often renders them indebted to those who mediate access to employment. As such, the development of an individuals' autonomy in securing employment is important, and works to increase their chances of exiting poverty. Social networks can help in preventing people from sliding further into poverty, and enable exit from poverty. For example, the study found that a 25 year-old with a regular family support system was 2.5 times more likely to escape poverty than their counter-part who lacked such a support system. A 40 year-old who can benefit from a social network outside their family (e.g. employer, friends, NGOs) found their chances of escaping poverty in old-age multiply twelvefold. However, family ties and social support networks are in themselves insufficient to enable people to climb out of poverty and must be complemented by support from central and local government support mechanism.

## Recommended action to tackle chronic poverty in Senegal

Chronic poverty in Senegal is not irreversible, and the following policy recommendations suggest the way forward.

As chronic poverty, transitional poverty, and vulnerability predominantly affect rural populations and those lacking education, efforts need to focus on developing human capital, agricultural investments, and improving food security, particularly in rural areas. Within this, they should be geared towards areas with high employment potential (e.g. rural areas can act as a lever for other sectors because of the high agro-production potential).

The social economy – social entrepreneurship and other economic activity with a social end (e.g. credit unions) – must act as a lever for endogenous development and needs to be linked with development initiatives at both local and national levels. Overall, policies must be coherent and focus on cross-sector integration and the development of economic clusters. The Government must learn from, and link with, successful initiatives led by other stakeholders, embracing an ethos of open-governance.

Inclusive growth (putting the poor and the middle-classes at the centre of wealth production and sharing); sustainable economy; human rights; open governance; geographical balance; and upward social mobility must act as the guiding principles of public policies. These policies must also be geared at enabling upward social mobility. Decent education (especially post-primary education), decent employment, and professional and vocational training provide important means of social mobility.

Social support networks enable families to survive, but are not sufficient enough to help people climb out of poverty. Support from central and local government must complement these community support mechanisms in a way that is targeted, structured, and inclusive. In this context, policies must focus on the empowerment of women, particularly with regard to entrepreneurship and home-economics.

Changes in family structures threaten children's futures, and put children at greater risk. There is a need to reform the public school system to provide better quality education and greater accessibility. A child protection strategy is essential, and must include equal opportunity for all children and provisions to deal with child abuse.

<p><b>Policy Priorities</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of human capital and social policies: education, vocational training, widespread health services, social housing, sanitation, nutrition, etc.</li> <li>2. Targeted and coherent investments in agriculture and rural development.</li> <li>3. Promotion of the social economy (social entrepreneurship). Mobilisation of national resources and protection of means of production with respect to SMEs as a priority in wealth creation.</li> <li>4. Social nets (provisions against shocks and disasters, cash transfers, community health providers, community nutrition, extension of social security , support to vulnerable groups: HIV patients, victims of conflict, displaced populations, disabled individuals etc.) ; and child protection (respect for children rights, protection for vulnerable and malnourished children, guarantees against child abuse, and care for children who have broken the law, etc.).</li> </ol>	<p><b>Expected policy outcomes</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increases in human capital leading to greater social mobility and a larger middle class.</li> <li>2. Food security as a result of larger outputs and productivity, a diversity of sectors leading to economic growth.</li> <li>3. Redistribution of resources.</li> <li>4. Transparency, equality, and improved quality of public services resulting from stronger governance and more balanced geographic clusters.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Policy Targets</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Integrate poor, vulnerable, and middle-class people.</li> <li>2. Invest in young people, and pay special attention to children.</li> <li>3. Empower women in their roles with respect to entrepreneurship and home economics.</li> <li>4. Prioritise rural populations and those living in the outskirts of large cities.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Policy Approaches</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Appropriate targeting and prioritisation of groups, communities, and localities.</li> <li>2. Upward approach: local development, collective responsibility, equal access to public services, improved quality of public services.</li> <li>3. Coherence in policy formulation: cross-sector integration, formulation of policies promoting economic growth, development of economic clusters.</li> <li>4. Open governance promoting co-production of policies by various stakeholders, accountability, efficiency of results, scaling up of social and technical innovations.</li> </ol>

This policy note was written by Dhana Wadugodapitiya with contributions from Lucy Scott

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The **Chronic Poverty Research Centre** (CPRC) is an international partnership of universities, research institutes and NGOs, with the central aim of creating knowledge that contributes to both the speed and quality of poverty reduction, and a focus on assisting those who are trapped in poverty, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

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