

CASE STUDY

Senegal: Participatory Land Use Planning and Conflict Resolution under the Seen Suuf Project

OVERVIEW

Submitting Organization	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH https://www.giz.de/de/projekte/unterstuetzung-von-landrecht-und-landverwaltung-ii
Type of Grievance Mechanism	Innovative and Hybrid Mechanism
Level of operation	Municipal/Community
Geographic Scope	Senegal (regions of Kaolack and Kaffrine)

SYNOPSIS

The case study highlights the Seen Suuf project in Senegal, which introduced a locally embedded mechanism to address land-related disputes in the regions of Kaolack and Kaffrine. The project responded to recurring conflicts between land users—particularly farmers and herders—by strengthening municipal land governance through participatory land use planning (Plan d’Occupation et d’Affectation des Sols – POAS) and the establishment of community-based conflict resolution committees. The main approach combined preventive land-use planning with an alternative conflict resolution mechanism, formally embedded in municipal processes. Supported by the German Government and implemented jointly by the Senegalese Ministry of Finance and GIZ, the project reinforced local institutional capacity, promoted inclusive stakeholder participation, and linked land governance reforms with accessible, village-level dispute resolution.¹

BACKGROUND

Land disputes between farmers and herders are a principal source of conflict in Senegal. Many municipalities lack clearly defined territorial boundaries and often allocate farmland along pastoral routes, while herders may not always follow the designated corridors, leading to crop damage and tensions between users.

In the regions of **Kaffrine** and **Kaolack**, these disputes are aggravated by high population density, soil degradation—particularly salinization—and encroachment into pastoral and forest areas. Urban expansion and the growth of agro-industrial activities, especially in the salt sector, further intensify competition for land. Weak control over communal territories and the absence of spatial planning documents, land registers, and reliable data increase the risk of conflict over the *domaine nationale*, which covers about 90 percent of Senegal’s land and is administered by local governments.

¹ <https://www.giz.de/en/projects/support-land-rights-and-land-management-0>

A major challenge to tenure security lies in the discrepancy between statutory land law and customary practices, which has led to informal transactions—such as the sale, loan, rental, or donation of land—despite their formal prohibition under existing legislation. The land governance system is also constrained by a lack of land information, rural planning documents, and locally agreed rules or codes of conduct, as well as overlapping mandates among administrative departments. Moreover, the absence of harmonized land management tools—such as validated land registers, boundary plans, and clear formalization procedures—combined with limited technical capacity and incomplete natural resource data, continues to hinder sustainable land use and the achievement of land degradation neutrality.

MECHANISM

To address recurring land-related conflicts, the *Seen Suuf* project adopted a dual approach combining participatory land use planning—locally referred to as the *Plan d’Occupation et d’Affectation des Sols* (POAS)—with the formalization of local conflict management committees. This approach aims to prevent disputes through clarified land-use arrangements, while establishing structured, locally embedded mechanisms for resolving conflicts when they occur.

Linking Participatory Land Use Planning with Conflict Resolution

The mechanism applies a dual strategy that combines preventive measures through participatory POAS with curative measures through locally anchored conflict resolution mechanisms operating at multiple administrative levels. This integrated approach has been formalised by municipalities and embedded within local planning processes. By linking land-use planning with structured dispute-resolution arrangements, the mechanism enables rural municipalities to better manage land allocation, address conflicts at their point of origin, and strengthen their institutional capacity for land governance. The POAS process functions not only as a technical planning instrument, but also as a political and institutional capacity-building framework that supports local accountability and more consistent management of land-related disputes.

This dual approach is anchored in Senegal’s broader **decentralization and land governance framework**. Act III of decentralization, formalized through Law No. 2013-10 of 28 December 2013 (*Code général des collectivités territoriales*), reinforced full communalization and devolved substantial responsibilities to municipalities in the areas of spatial planning, land management, and environmental governance. In parallel, the Government of Senegal has strengthened access to mediation through the establishment of *Maisons de la justice* (Houses of Justice) as formal venues for dispute resolution.

Taken together, this legal and institutional framework provides municipalities with a clear **mandate to design, operationalize, and implement conflict resolution mechanisms** within planning instruments such as POAS. By embedding dispute-resolution functions within land-use planning processes, the approach connects land governance reforms with local accountability structures and accessible, community-oriented grievance mechanisms.

The establishment of the mechanism involved a broad coalition of state and non-state actors:

- Ministry of Finance and National Budget (MFB)
- Ministry of Urban Planning, Local Government and Territorial Development (MUCTAT)
- National Spatial Planning Agency (ANAT)
- Regional Development Agencies (ARD)
- Tax Service Centres (*Centres des Services Fiscaux*)
- Local Authorities, including land agents, municipal secretaries, and mayors
- Extended Property Commissions (*Commissions domaniales*)

- Representatives of transhumant pastoralists, local farmers, traditional authorities, and universities
- County Court (*Tribunal de Grande Instance*)
- Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany
- GFA Consulting Group GmbH

The *Seen Suuf* project, financed by the German Government and implemented jointly by the Senegalese Ministry of Finance and the GIZ, operates in the regions of Kaolack and Kaffrine and is implemented through a participatory and inclusive process.

Conflict resolution committees were established during village assemblies, with members elected by community representatives. Consulted stakeholders included village and traditional chiefs, herders, agricultural organizations, fishermen, salt workers, women's and youth representatives, notables, as well as customary and religious authorities. The process draws on **endogenous conflict resolution traditions**, notably the cultural principle of *sutura*, which emphasizes discretion, respect, and the preservation of social harmony by avoiding the public exposure of disputes. In parallel, stakeholders received training and awareness-raising on land and natural resource management, conflict prevention, and alternative dispute resolution methods.

Formalized in 2022 with an initial focus on land-related disputes, the mechanism was subsequently expanded to reflect the increasing influence of climate variability on land-related pressures. As a result, the land use planning tool has evolved to incorporate objectives related to environmental sustainability, land degradation neutrality, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem restoration. This expanded scope supports conflict prevention and management by:

- establishing consensual rules for access to and rational use of forest resources;
- involving local populations in restoration and conservation activities;
- encouraging changes in forest management practices;
- facilitating equitable access to land and natural resources while respecting ecological limits and existing rights;
- creating structured spaces for dialogue among relevant stakeholders;
- contributing to climate mitigation objectives through the protection and enhancement of carbon sinks

The mechanism is **open to all affected stakeholders**, primarily serving local residents. It is designed to ensure that land-related grievances are addressed and resolved at the local level, where they originate.

PROCESS

The grievance process typically begins when a conflict—such as between a farmer and a herder—arises in a community with an established *Cellule Villageoise de Gestion des Conflits Fonciers (CVGC)*.

1. **Filing:** Either party contacts a CVGC member to initiate proceedings.
2. **Registration:** The dispute is recorded and transferred to the municipal land agent, who enters it into an official register.
3. **Monitoring:** The municipality tracks recurring conflict types and hotspots, enabling targeted preventive measures.

Once a grievance is recorded, the following steps apply:

4. **Hearing:** Both parties are invited to present their perspectives before the committee.
5. **Dialogue and Mediation:** The committee encourages direct communication between the parties to reach mutual understanding.
6. **Decision-making:** The committee deliberates and communicates its resolution. Committees typically include village chiefs, elders, women's and youth representatives, and socio-professional delegates, ensuring broad-based community participation.

The process is intended to be **accessible, informal, and cost-free** for the disputing parties., emphasizing rapid response and local ownership. The committee members contribute their expertise and neutrality, ensuring fairness and legitimacy. Processing times vary by case. While the mechanism is designed to be swift, delays persist and remain a concern among civil society, government, and local communities. There is no standardized duration, and some cases may take considerable time to resolve.

Municipal authorities play a central role in social mediation and conflict resolution, with an emphasis on resolving disputes between residents of the same village or municipality in order to maintain social cohesion. Unresolved or poorly managed land disputes can undermine continued cohabitation and local stability. Where disputes cannot be satisfactorily resolved at the local level, cases may be referred to the gendarmerie, the courts, or submitted to arbitration by the sub-prefect. However, access to these formal mechanisms is often constrained by distance and transportation costs, as such institutions generally operate at the regional rather than the village level.

OUTCOMES

By integrating conflict resolution structures within the POAS, the mechanism contributed to the prevention of land-related disputes through the clarification and zoning of different land uses. The POAS document regulated activities, established rules, and clarified boundaries and claims. Its public and inclusive development process raised awareness among local populations, an effect further reinforced through the dissemination of maps and targeted awareness-raising activities.

In parallel, the conflict resolution committees accompanying the POAS created spaces for inclusive dialogue, enabling local issues to be discussed and addressed openly. By promoting community-level engagement, these platforms supported the identification of locally grounded solutions, strengthened trust among stakeholders, and reduced the likelihood of recurring conflicts.

Effective Village-Level Resolution of Land Disputes under the Seen Suuf Project

Conflict resolution committees and participatory *POAS* were implemented across 17 beneficiary communities under the *Seen Suuf* project. As a result, approximately 60 percent of land disputes were resolved at the village level, without recourse to higher authorities. Most cases were addressed through mediation led by village chiefs in collaboration with other community leaders, facilitating local dialogue and supporting the resolution of land-related grievances at the community level.

LESSONS LEARNED

The functioning of the mechanism has been supported by a **combination of political commitment, institutional partnerships, and local ownership.**

At the national level, land management has been elevated as a **policy priority** under the leadership of President Bassirou Diomaye Diakharr Faye and within the framework of the *Senegal 2050 Agenda*, which

emphasizes the regularization of land practices, conflict resolution, and tenure security in both rural and urban areas.

At the institutional level, collaboration with the World Bank's *Projet Cadastre et Sécurisation Foncière (PROCASEF)* provided complementary support by **documenting land rights** in 138 municipalities and advancing a national land registration system.

At the community level, the mechanism built on existing conflict resolution practices, which were **formalized and made more inclusive**, with local communities demonstrating sustained engagement in its operation.

Key challenges include the voluntary and unpaid nature of committee membership, which may affect long-term motivation, as well as financial and logistical barriers—particularly transportation costs—that can limit access to higher-level dispute resolution bodies. These factors may constrain participation and the sustained effectiveness of the mechanism.

Priority areas for enhancement include continued awareness-raising and capacity-building among local authorities and communities, greater use of committees as platforms for dialogue and information exchange, and strengthened participation of women and youth in decision-making processes. Ensuring regular committee meetings, expanding public communication through local media, and improving coordination and information flows among relevant institutions are also identified as important steps to support the mechanism's long-term effective.