

Voices from the territories: experiences and challenges of the energy transition in Senegal

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Key messages

- Renewable energy can become a powerful driver of local development (through electrification, job creation, municipal revenue, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises), provided it responds to real needs and avoids land and economic tensions.

- Local governments and communities support the idea of an energy transition, but are largely unaware of the JETP. From this partnership, they expect reliable energy for productive use, sustainable jobs, and tangible benefits for women and youth. Prioritizing awareness sessions on the investment plan in targeted areas is therefore essential.

- The government must revise local government codes and make detailed economic baseline studies mandatory before any energy project is approved, in addition to socio-environmental impact assessments.

- The energy transition is incomplete if it excludes women: they bear the impacts without sharing in the benefits. Future energy projects must integrate gender markers and inclusive measures, which are indispensable conditions for a just and sustainable transition.

- Energy financing and projects must be conditioned on transparency, community participation, accountability, and clear commitments on local employment, mitigation measures, and benefit sharing.

- The JETP will succeed if Senegal strengthens local government capacity, adopts standard contract models, and establishes transparent multi-stakeholder monitoring mechanisms. Civil society (PACTEJ) must continue its role in information-sharing, oversight, and community support.

Introduction

Senegal has considerable renewable energy potential, including solar, wind, and hydropower, that remains largely underexploited. With the energy transition in view, the country has, over the past several years, committed to developing renewable energy projects, including at the territorial level, where they now account for 30% of installed national capacity.

In 2023, Senegal joined the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), with the objective of increasing the share of renewables to 40% by 2030, reducing production costs, improving electricity access in rural areas, creating local jobs, limiting environmental impacts, and stimulating territorial development.

The JETP mechanism is still in the design and validation phase. It will be accompanied by an investment plan, not yet published, comprising 34 validated projects, of which only 11 have secured financing. In that investment plan, the government acknowledges the need to establish a body, commission, or working group dedicated to equity and justice, whose mandate would be to "evaluate projects" and which "may request modifications or amendments to better respect equity and justice criteria," with a particular focus on the social impacts of selected projects, including employment, local content, training, social dialogue, gender, and human rights.

In this context, the energy transition must not be reduced to a mere technological shift or a set of quantitative production targets. It must be just and equitable. This means integrating the needs and voices of directly affected communities, reducing inequalities, preparing local governments for the transformations ahead, and ensuring that the benefits of the transition reach everyone, especially the most vulnerable groups.

This analysis builds on previous NRGI work on the JETP in Senegal, developed in partnership with Senegalese civil society organizations, with the goal of amplifying the voices of communities and local authorities likely to host energy projects. It draws lessons from the power plants established in Bargny (coal), Malicounda (thermal and solar), Méouane (solar), and Taïba Ndiaye (wind), highlighting the experiences of municipalities and local communities regarding governance practices and the socio-environmental impacts of these projects. It also examines how renewable energy projects have been implemented in practice, the gaps between stated "just transition" principles and on-the-ground realities, and formulates concrete, actionable recommendations.

This work is the product of desk research combined with in-depth interviews, focus groups, and site observations in the areas hosting the projects. In total, ten interviews and five focus groups were conducted.

The interviews and focus groups were carried out by a joint team from NRGI (Natural Resource Governance Institute), LSD (Lumière Synergie pour le Développement), and WIM (Women in Mining). Data were collected from communities, with particular attention to women, community leaders, and young people, as well as from elected local officials. On 19 November 2025, NRGI organized a workshop to review preliminary findings with community actors, local authorities, and civil society organizations, to cross-check and strengthen the field data.

Some limitations of this study should be noted, in particular the absence of direct interviews with companies operating in the areas studied, which would have allowed for cross-checking and verification of the information gathered from communities and local authorities.

This gap underscores the need for a more balanced and ongoing dialogue between public, private, and community actors, in order to build a shared understanding of the real impacts of energy projects on local territories.

Territories and energy projects: between experience and hope for a just and equitable energy transition

In Senegal, many local governments, including Taïba Ndiaye, Malicounda, Sinthiou Mékhé, Manantali, Sakal, Bokol, and others, have already had direct experience with renewable energy development: solar, wind, and hydroelectric plants.

In the context of the JETP's implementation, these experiences offer valuable lessons about the challenges to be overcome, the conditions for success, and the possible socio-economic impacts, as seen from the perspective of the communities receiving the projects identified in the investment plan.

Experiences with fossil fuel plants also provide important information for authorities and civil society actors, by revealing the realities faced by communities and local governments.

As Senegal prepares to implement the JETP, it is essential to build on these lessons in order to achieve an energy transition that is inclusive, equitable, and beneficial to all.

The Bargny coal plant: a model not to be replicated in future energy projects

On 25 November 2009, the Board of Directors of the African Development Bank (AfDB) approved a loan of 55 million euros to the Compagnie d'Électricité du Sénégal (CES) for the development and operation of Senegal's first coal-fired power plant.

The project was co-financed by two other multilateral development banks: the West African Development Bank and the Dutch development finance institution FMO.

Located in the department of Rufisque, the commune of Bargny is caught between rapid demographic pressure, coastal erosion driven by climate change, the presence of the SOCOCIM cement plant (one of the country's major cement complexes), and the expansion of the Diamniadio industrial zone. It was in this context that a coal-fired plant was built, as part of the Takkal plan, a national program designed to address the country's energy crisis.

With a theoretical capacity of 125 MW, the plant occupies 29 hectares and was initially intended to help secure national electricity supply. Located near the sea, in the areas of Sendou and Minam, the installation significantly reduces the land available to the commune.

Its coexistence with fishing activity is seen by residents as having significant negative impacts on local economies, particularly affecting women engaged in fish processing.

Interviews with communities and local authorities in Bargny, as well as the compliance verification reports of the AfDB's Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) and FMO's Independent Complaints Mechanism (ICM) (from 2020 and 2023), document serious socio-economic and environmental failures in the installation and management of the plant.

Perceptions of socio-economic impacts: marginalization, loss of revenue, and social fracture

Communities consulted in focus groups and individual interviews in Bargny believe that the project violated community land rights from the outset. The plant was built on a site originally intended to accommodate 1,433 plots for families displaced by coastal erosion, thereby denying them their right to housing. After reviewing the Sendou power plant project's compliance with applicable AfDB policies and procedures, the IRM concluded in 2019 that it did not comply with the environmental and social performance standards of the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

This conclusion was based in part on the potential disruption of livelihoods resulting from the displacement of fish-drying enterprises within the site's buffer zone, inadequate public consultations, the absence of a resettlement action plan, and potential negative impacts on the marine environment.

These findings were reinforced by the FMO's ICM 2023 report, which also identified non-compliance in the project's land management.

For focus group participants and workshop attendees, Bargny's economic fabric, sustained primarily by fishing, women's fish processing activities, and okra cultivation during the rainy season, is directly affected by the coal plant's operations. Coal dust contamination, for example, negatively affects the quality and market value of smoked fish. As one community leader interviewed in Bargny put it: "Coal has covered our future in black dust. Our products no longer sell; our land is dead."

The women interviewed denounced the fact that no baseline economic assessment of their income had been conducted, and that no resettlement plan had been put in place. Those who continue to work near the plant remain continuously exposed to the economic risks caused by coal and ash dust deposits.

Prospects for relocation remain uncertain, as the ICM 2023 report notes the absence of available land.

A tripartite protocol was signed in 2017 between CES, the municipality of Bargny, and SENELEC (Société Nationale d'Électricité du Sénégal). This protocol is accompanied by a social action plan focusing on education, local economic development, women's empowerment, culture, and sanitation.

The agreement includes annual support of 330 million FCFA and a fund of 200 million FCFA for women, fishers, and artisans. These amounts are, however, considered insufficient, and their management is regarded as opaque.

The women processors and community leaders consulted view them as a smokescreen designed to conceal the plant's socio-economic impacts. The commune of Bargny has no oversight over the projects funded through the plant, since these are defined and managed by CES, as illustrated by one municipal councillor's testimony: "The commune has no say. It's the plant that defines, finances, and monitors its own projects."

Certain infrastructure works (roads and footbridges that, according to some women, benefit plant workers more than local communities) have been completed, and donations have been made to various religious institutions. For some community members interviewed in this study, these expenditures are perceived as acts of "social corruption" designed to buy the support of communities opposed to the coal plant. As one woman processor said during a focus group: "They give us roads, but it's to buy our silence." A municipal councillor put it more bluntly: "These actions are corruption to obtain social legitimacy." These practices, described as "clientelism," have also fuelled internal tensions within communities by creating divisions.

Several interlocutors explained that some community members, sometimes won over by individual benefits, have come to defend the project, while others continue to oppose it. As one local elected official summed it up: "The plant managed to divide us. Some defend the project for their own interests, others want nothing to do with it, but everyone suffers the pollution."

Similar views were also expressed during the preliminary results workshop.

Perceptions of environmental impacts: pollution, vulnerability, and degraded living conditions

The community interviews, corroborated by the desk review, clearly show that the coal plant, which became operational in 2018, has negative impacts on the environment and on local populations.

Senegal's 2001 Environmental Code (Article L. 13) requires that certain installations be located at a minimum radius of 500 metres from dwellings, residential areas, watercourses and lakes, and transport routes. In Bargny's case, the women processors' economic activities are directly adjacent to the plant's facilities. This situation was strongly denounced by the women during interviews. As one resident stated: "My children go to school and get medical care in the shadow of the plant."

This problematic proximity between the plant and its neighbours was already reported in FMO's 2016 report.

Through this coal plant, the commune of Bargny is exposed to the risk of cumulative impacts from pollution generated by the SOCOCIM cement plant, the coal plant itself, and the transport of coal from Dakar to the site.

The absence of reliable ambient air monitoring in the surrounding area could pose a genuine long-term health risk for populations along the Rufisque–Bargny–Sendou axis. A community audit conducted in 2019 by Natural Justice, the FMO's 2023 compliance review, and field observations made during this study all documented coal particle deposits in the vicinity of the plant, directly affecting the economic activities of the women working in the area. The problem is compounded by ash management practices considered non-compliant with IFC international standards for this type of facility. Coal emissions produce black dust that settles on homes and on the fish products processed by women, degrading their quality and market value.

As one woman processor working on the site put it: "Since the plant arrived, our products are covered in black, oily dust; it destroys our okra crops. Our harvests come out blackened."

On the question of water-related risks, the ICM 2023 report noted that the management of drinking water and groundwater contamination risks was only partially compliant with IFC requirements, due to "a lack of progress in addressing potential sources of water pollution, such as the effluent and stormwater system, the ash dump, and the coal storage system."

The same report also found that the management of coal transport and storage, as well as air quality monitoring, were not compliant with IFC performance standards on environmental and social sustainability.

Perceptions of project governance: between opacity and a lack of accountability

The process of establishing the coal plant has been widely condemned by communities for its lack of transparency and meaningful consultation. Environmental impact assessments were perceived by Bargny interviewees as biased, due to insufficient public consultation, and no socio-economic baseline on women's situations around the plant, or on marine impacts at the project's outset, was ever produced. This generated deep frustration among communities, who feel that project developers deliberately minimized the real risks of locating the plant in that area by presenting incomplete data on socio-economic and environmental impacts.

The absence of prior consultation, combined with the lack of transparent information processes, is consistently denounced by communities interviewed in this study, who describe the coal plant as a project imposed by the state without consultation. The views expressed indicate that consultations, when they did take place, were more formal than participatory, with no genuine consideration of residents' concerns. This information deficit and the absence of meaningful participation produced a strong sense of injustice and marginalization.



Pond juxtaposing the Bargny coal plant, Senegal

As one woman processor recounted: “We were simply told that a coal plant would be built [...] The population had expressed its opposition.” A community leader confirmed: “We were listened to, but ignored.” FMO’s 2016 report itself noted that “until the actual start of construction work in 2013, the project and its relevant developments were unknown to most local groups.” The 2023 report added that “before the project started, no consultation was conducted with landowners and no baseline study was carried out to identify potentially affected households. Consultation processes began much later.”

The community monitoring committee established in 2016 lacks real power and independence. According to several interviewees, major decisions, including on financing, priorities, and recruitment, are made unilaterally by the plant, while the municipality plays a purely peripheral role. As one municipal councillor lamented: “Even the medical equipment that is donated is distributed without any involvement of the commune.”

Furthermore, the dispute surrounding the Bargny plant, involving a claim of over 30 billion FCFA in unpaid debt by Nordic Power AB, a Swedish energy company involved in the project, reveals gaps in financial transparency and accountability. This legal dispute underscores the need for strengthened project governance in order to restore the trust of communities and local authorities. It also highlights the potential risks to the stability of energy projects and the credibility of the actors involved.

Within this context of persistent governance failures, some recent developments are nonetheless worth noting, without prejudging their effective implementation or their capacity to address the identified shortcomings. CES took a significant step toward environmental and social transparency by publishing, in March 2025, its Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP), Annual Plan 2025, and its Environmental and Social Action Plan (ESAP 2025).

These documents reflect a stated intention to structure the project’s environmental governance through planned and budgeted actions that appear to address the non-conformities raised in the ICM reports and the concerns of local populations. The SEP 2025 presents community engagement activities with an associated budget, while the ESAP 2025 lists corrective and preventive measures with assigned responsibilities, timelines, and

indicators.

Together, these tools reflect an effort to institutionalize corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices and to acknowledge the social and environmental stakes involved in plant management.

However, several areas require close attention in the execution of these plans, notably budgetary transparency, participatory monitoring, information sharing, and accountability. Consultation and grievance mechanisms must be strengthened to ensure genuine involvement of local populations, particularly women, youth, and fishers.

The Bargny case illustrates the pitfalls of an energy policy pursued without grounding in social and environmental justice. Designed to secure national electricity supply, the coal plant has translated locally into economic losses, health risks, and opaque governance, fuelling a deep sense of marginalization. A comparable dynamic is found in South Africa, where coal dependence has produced major environmental and health impacts, while JETP governance has faced criticism over insufficient transparency and inadequate social protections for workers and mining communities.

Both experiences serve as reminders that, as Senegal engages with the JETP, the credibility and sustainability of an energy transition depend on the genuine inclusion of communities, transparency in governance, and respect for local rights; without these, the transition risks reproducing or deepening existing injustices.

The commune of Méouane: a major solar park for the country, but an energy transition still inequitable for communities

The commune of Méouane, located in the department of Tivaouane (Thiès region), sits at the crossroads of multiple pressures: industrial expansion (in particular that of Industries Chimiques du Sénégal, ICS, a major player in the phosphates and fertilizers sector), rapid demographic growth, intensified land pressure, and agricultural development.

The municipality hosts a 64-hectare solar park in the village of Santhiou Mékhé, regarded as the largest in West Africa. Operated by Senergy since 2017, the park comprises more than 92,000 photovoltaic panels with an installed capacity of 29 MW, fed directly into SENELEC's national grid (Société Nationale d'Électricité du Sénégal, the national concessionaire for electricity production, transmission, distribution, and sales) under an exclusive contract.

Initially presented as a flagship project of Senegal's energy transition, the solar park now raises, from local communities' perspective, significant debates about the equitable distribution of its benefits, the management of its environmental and social impacts, and the local governance deficit surrounding its implementation.

Perceptions of socio-economic benefits: limited and not sustainable

At its inauguration in June 2017 by President Macky Sall, the Méouane solar park raised high expectations among local communities. The socio-economic dimension of the plant at Méouane illustrates a fragile balance between the one-off benefits and the negative impacts perceived by communities.

During the construction phase, approximately 300 people were employed, creating temporary income opportunities for local populations, as recalled by the director of Senegal's Sovereign Strategic Investment Fund (FONSIS) during the park's inauguration ceremony.

The memorandum of understanding with the 75 households affected by the park's construction, mentioned during interviews, enabled the financing of certain infrastructure works: school and cemetery fencing in Tongo, the construction of a maternity ward and equipped classrooms in Santhiou Mékhé, and the development of a 14-hectare agricultural perimeter equipped with a borehole and a perimeter management committee. A four-hectare market garden plot was also developed for affected households, and a commitment to fund an 80 million FCFA health and social centre had been made.

During the workshop organized as part of this study, municipal staff noted that the direct economic benefits for the local government are limited. Electricity production is fed entirely into SENELEC's grid, with no local supply mechanism, even as around 20 of the 89 villages bordering the solar park still lack electricity access. Moreover, the developer's promise to provide local residents with access to solar panels for their agricultural activities has not been honoured, according to several residents interviewed. The economic contribution to rental value (70 to 71 million FCFA) was initially not transferred locally, but sent directly to Dakar, where the developer's headquarters are located, thereby depriving the commune of essential resources. Only through intense municipal mobilization and the intervention of a legal expert was the commune able to recover these rental contributions from 2021 onwards; the amounts owed for prior years remain lost. Furthermore, the developer's inaugural pledge to grant 4% of its capital to local populations (1% to the departmental council and 3% to the commune) has never been followed up. These broken promises generated frustration and a sense of injustice, as one elected official noted: "There was no follow-up after the commitments [...] We have no idea where the promises stand."

The allocation of 64 hectares of land, previously used for agro-sylvo-pastoral activities, to the plant is perceived by communities as an expropriation that has severely affected the commune's economic activity. This expropriation produced not only a loss of income for families, but also a significant reduction in cultivable land and pasture, intensifying the risks of food insecurity and threatening local livelihoods. During the workshop held as part of this study,

communities and local elected officials from Méouane also shared a sense of having been kept in the dark about the type of contract linked to the plant. They had assumed that the land would be returned to communities at the end of the 25-year contract. In fact, SENELEC will take ownership at the end of that contract, a revelation that generated a further sense of injustice regarding compensation terms.

In terms of employment, the operational phase generates far fewer jobs, with only four residents retained in cleaning positions, despite promises of two jobs per expropriated household. These commitments had been seen as integral to communities' consent to the expropriation, since land is viewed as an asset to be passed on to future generations.

Méouane, already losing agricultural land to ICS year after year, is also experiencing rural exodus. The focus groups conducted for this study indicate that the absence of structured programs for women (such as a processing unit or storage facility) and for youth further reinforces social exclusion, deepens the sense of marginalization, and contributes to this phenomenon.

Perceptions of environmental impacts: limited, but a source of concern

In Méouane's case, the environmental impacts shared during workshops and focus groups relate primarily to the heavy machinery traffic during the construction phase, which caused deterioration of roads and agricultural tracks, complicating access to fields and markets.

Participants also raised environmental impacts linked to tree felling during construction, which reportedly contributed to soil erosion, microclimate change, and weakened local biodiversity.

Although the developer negotiated a reforestation programme for the village of Tongo and its surroundings, its deployment remains dependent on weather conditions and has not yet compensated for the damage incurred.

Perceptions of project governance: an urgent need to strengthen transparency and local government participation

The governance of the energy project in Méouane is perceived as opaque and insufficiently inclusive. The protocol monitoring committee established is composed solely of representatives from affected households, excluding the municipality, thereby limiting institutional participation and visibility over the developer's implementation of commitments. Local elected officials lament that major announcements, such as the transfer to the commune of 3% or 4% of the plant's capital, have never been formalized: "The President of the Republic spoke of transferring 3% of the plant's capital to the commune in his inaugural address... but nothing was ever formalized or followed through."

Local authorities encountered during the sharing day and through interviews conducted as part of this study feel marginalized and sidelined by the developer. They point to their inability to access information about the project during its operational phase, or to the fact that the developer has organized just one meeting with local populations, which has greatly contributed to a climate of mistrust.

Local authorities call for mechanisms that combine transparency of commitments, multi-stakeholder monitoring, and periodic accountability that is accessible to all communities. Communities and elected officials specifically recommend establishing a multi-stakeholder monitoring committee, creating a multifunctional platform dedicated to women, and setting up a foundation to govern the plant's social and environmental commitments. These mechanisms would be essential to ensure participatory governance, strengthen residents' trust, and guarantee that the project's initial commitments are effectively implemented.

Local populations also expressed strong expectations around electrification, infrastructure, and the use of locally produced energy to support productive activities, in particular through the installation of boreholes or solar systems for agricultural operations. "This energy must also serve the local economy [...] not only feed the national grid," one resident said.

While the Méouane solar park represents a strategic asset for the national energy transition, it reveals persistent inequalities in the distribution of benefits and continues to generate negative impacts for local communities. The experience highlights the urgent need to strengthen transparency, institutional participation, and multi-stakeholder monitoring, so that the developer's commitments translate into tangible economic, social, and environmental benefits for residents.

Establishing clear contractual mechanisms, participatory platforms, and initiatives targeting women and youth is essential to transform this project into a concrete example of a just and inclusive energy transition.

The commune of Taïba Ndiaye: a contested just energy transition record and governance challenged by local governments and communities

The commune of Taïba Ndiaye, located in the Thiès region, is today one of the key nodes of Senegal's national energy production. It concentrates several major infrastructure assets: the Taïba Ndiaye wind farm (158 MW, with 46 turbines spaced 400 metres apart along a 34 km route), the Tobene Power thermal plant (115 MW, heavy fuel oil), and a coal plant operated by ICS (20 MW) for its own production.

This concentration of mixed energy assets places the commune at the heart of the national energy transition, but also exposes it to considerable social pressures and cumulative environmental and economic risks.

For the communities interviewed in Taïba Ndiaye, the energy projects located in the area have produced contrasting results for the commune and its inhabitants, depending on the type of project.

Perceptions of socio-economic impacts: a significant wave of opportunities, but still limited benefits for communities

The Taïba Ndiaye wind farm has generated substantial economic and social benefits, though these are unevenly perceived by those interviewed in this study. During the construction phase, it created approximately 900 temporary jobs, according to interviews with municipal staff. Significant social investments were also made by the developer: the construction of a middle school (CEM) in Thiallé (200 million FCFA), IT equipment for Taïba Ndiaye's secondary school, and student scholarships (10.8 million FCFA per year). Women received specific support: five community millet mills, 12 million FCFA in revolving credit, the establishment of cooperatives, and the installation of boreholes facilitating market gardening and other income-generating activities.

The project also generates recurring revenue for the local government. Surface rent reaches 1.5 million FCFA per turbine per year, indexed to a 2% annual increase, while the contribution to the Local Monitoring and Liaison Committee (Comité Local de Veille et de Liaison, CLVL) represents 1% of turnover, totalling 278 million FCFA in 2024. These funds transit through the national treasury and are budgeted by the commune to finance healthcare, education, women's activities, and social infrastructure. The tracks built to reach the turbines have also helped connect certain previously isolated villages, facilitating the transport of agricultural produce.

However, these gains are offset by negative impacts perceived by those interviewed. Land compensation is considered wholly inadequate by residents, calculated on rates deemed obsolete (105 FCFA/m^2, sometimes 65,000 FCFA for bare land), with no real compensation for agricultural losses. As one focus group participant stated: "Our village has been reduced by the land lost to the plants." The compensation process also generated profound humiliation, as one focus group participant in Taïba Ndiaye described: "They called us to Tivaouane and payment was made in public, without any discretion. We heard that other communities were compensated better than us."

On the agricultural front, residents report that turbine vibrations affect productivity, particularly in mango orchards, where flowers fall prematurely. The deterioration of roads caused by heavy machinery and harm to bird biodiversity compound these impacts.

Furthermore, the commune does not benefit directly from the electricity produced, which is fed into the national grid. Access remains managed by SENELEC at unchanged costs: "Even to electrify a village, we have to go through SENELEC," one local elected official noted. Permanent jobs generated by the park remain very limited (fewer than ten positions), with low integration of local labour. Finally, certain commitments announced by the plant's developers, such as the establishment of a CSR foundation and the delivery of additional social infrastructure, have not been fulfilled, feeding a climate of distrust.

The benefits of the thermal and coal plants are also perceived as more restricted, especially when compared to those generated by the wind farm. While Tobene Power has financed several infrastructure projects, including a municipal stadium, laterite tracks, and a gas kiln for women potters, these contributions are considered very modest relative to the negative externalities. As one student put it: "Tobene Power produces black smoke that destroys our crops. A harvest worth 600,000 FCFA can now barely fetch 30,000 FCFA." Similarly, ICS's coal plant remains the most heavily criticized by those interviewed: its harmful effects (smoke, crop destruction, respiratory illness) far outweigh the social or economic benefits, which communities describe as nearly non-existent.

Thus, while the wind farm represents, in communities' eyes, an energy transition with lower environmental impacts than thermal plants, its benefits remain fragile, accompanied as they are by persistent negative externalities and governance shortcomings.

Perceptions of environmental impacts: between turbines that blow and smoke that suffocates

The wind farm is perceived as a more environmentally respectful alternative. It generates neither smoke nor atmospheric pollutants, a considerable advantage over thermal plants. However, its impacts are not absent: it occupies agricultural land, reduces cultivable surface area, and causes disruption during installation works.

Negative externalities include harm to bird biodiversity, with turbine blades injuring or killing birds, as documented in the 2024 Lumière Synergie pour le Développement study. A group has been established in the commune to monitor the wind farm's impacts on bird biodiversity, with the aim of protecting and restoring it.

By contrast, the Tobene Power thermal plant and ICS's coal plant are strongly associated with environmental nuisance by the local governments and communities interviewed.

Emissions of black smoke, waste, and particulate matter affect air quality and contribute to the spread of respiratory diseases.

Populations interviewed also highlight the harmful effects on crops: mango harvests once estimated at several hundred thousand CFA francs now yield only a fraction of that value, a direct consequence of pollution, according to communities interviewed at the workshop.

From this perspective, wind energy is seen as the "cleaner" option, while thermal projects continue to degrade the environment.



Discussion with women in fish processing sites in Bargny, Senegal

Perceptions of governance: between broken promises and eroded trust

The governance of energy projects in Taïba Ndiaye has drawn heavy criticism from the communities interviewed, revealing a dynamic of centralized decision-making and a transparency deficit on the part of developers. Community members observe that strategic decisions are primarily negotiated between companies and the municipality, without genuine citizen involvement. Contracts signed with private operators are perceived as inaccessible, incomplete, or even "devoid of content." The mayor himself deplores: "The agreements are empty and provide no real benefits for the local community," and notes that "the park promised a foundation with 1.2 million euros, but to this day we know nothing about it." To address this institutional imbalance, the commune is considering hiring a legal expert to renegotiate the operating agreements, initially signed for twenty years. This step, though belated, clearly reflects a determination to reclaim control over a contractual framework that local authorities consider largely unfavourable to local interests.

Although multi-stakeholder committees exist, notably with the wind farm, their effectiveness remains limited. Several tensions have emerged, particularly around permanent employment for youth. Recruitment criteria were developed without genuine community involvement, provoking frustration and conflict. A selection committee established at the arrondissement level to advocate for positive discrimination was not integrated into the negotiations. The president of the youth association underscored the futility of initiatives with no concrete follow-through: "30 young people were trained by the park on solar energy, but nothing came of it."

Historically, the project was carried by local actors (the current mayor, then a senior technician, drove the first turbine installation) and validated by a municipal deliberation ceding 42 hectares for turbine construction. Yet local elected officials subsequently felt entirely excluded from the project's governance, which led to the circulation of rumours and partial or inaccurate information, and resulted in a loss of local political control.

It was only after tensions emerged, around perceived misinformation and land disputes, that a concertation framework was established. Members of this framework, trained in conflict management, worked with administrative authorities to resolve disputes. In parallel, a multi-stakeholder committee, established at the initiative of the wind farm, aimed to build consensus around local expertise and labour priorities, and to guide social investments.

The lack of visibility over the agreements, perceived as "devoid of content," reinforces the local government's exclusion from project governance and weakens its role in orienting social investments meaningfully. This incoherence fuels doubts among those surveyed about the traceability of funds and erodes trust between local actors and companies.

The Taïba Ndiaye case illustrates a governance model characterized by project centralization, weak citizen inclusion, and a reactive rather than proactive response to social and land tensions. Recent institutional adjustments (the forthcoming recruitment of a legal expert by the commune, the establishment of concertation frameworks) reflect a local desire to rebalance power relations, but remain fragile and insufficiently structured to guarantee a genuinely just and inclusive energy transition.

The commune of Malicounda: two plants, two lessons on how local governance makes the difference in energy projects

The commune of Malicounda, located in the department of Mbour (Thiès region), has become a major energy hub for Senegal. It hosts two strategic power facilities: a 120 MW thermal plant (a state project, operational since 2023) and a 22 MW solar plant (a public-private partnership, operational since 2016). These infrastructure assets, essential for meeting national electricity production targets, illustrate both the potential for positive local benefits and the environmental, social, and institutional risks that arise when governance remains centralized or incomplete.



A fisherman on the Saint-Louis River, in Senegal © Sun_Shine/ Shutterstock

Perceptions of socio-economic impacts: contrasting returns between promises and reality

The two energy projects located in Malicounda, the thermal plant and the solar plant, have generated significant but highly contrasting socio-economic benefits, as perceived by local communities.

On the thermal plant side, initial reactions were marked by tensions around expropriation and inadequate compensation. Several landowners denounced the compensation scales applied, considered far below the real market value of their land. As one resident explained: "I lost 15 hectares next to the thermal plant, yet I was not consulted before the land was allocated to SENELEC." Frustration was also fuelled by a sense of exclusion: some residents believe that project validation was led by outside individuals "presented as community representatives" who were not directly affected.

Once awareness-raising sessions were organized, populations ultimately accepted the project, given its strategic importance for the country and their expectations for their local area. The 120 MW plant generates approximately 200 million FCFA per year for the local government, a non-negligible contribution to local finances. Social investments have also been made, including an ultrasound machine worth 25 million FCFA, the installation of solar street lights for public spaces and schools, the launch of a programme for 550 street lights, and a commitment to build a multi-use stadium. However, residents highlight the limited access of youth and women to employment opportunities, even for unskilled positions, as well as the absence of specific support for women's groups and local economic development initiatives.

By contrast, the solar plant appears to represent a more fully negotiated governance model. From the outset, the commune secured legal counsel to defend the interests of local populations. Compensation was more substantial, according to the municipal officer interviewed: the commune negotiated 300 million FCFA for landowners and a further 300 million FCFA for the local government. The latter reinvested these funds in the electrification of eight villages.

The agreement mentioned by the municipal officer was signed before a notary and also secured lasting benefits: the chair of the board of directors was given to the mayor; a 5% equity stake in the company; the construction of a maternity ward; the installation of 250 street lights; road infrastructure improvements; and a local labour recruitment policy (50% for skilled jobs and 80% for unskilled positions).

Nonetheless, during the focus group with communities and local authorities, it emerged that certain promises are slow to materialize, in particular the effective transfer of the 5% equity stake, compliance with the skilled employment quota, and the development of the promised 20 hectares of market garden perimeters.

Perceptions of environmental impacts: between nuisance and greater acceptability

Community assessments of the two projects' environmental impacts in Malicounda are mixed and differ markedly from one plant to the other.

The thermal plant is strongly criticized by communities for the noise and smoke it generates. Residents living near the thermal plant denounce persistent noise and atmospheric pollution: constant noise, visible black smoke deposits that settle on homes and crops, and deteriorating public health.

As one resident testified: "Every morning, we find black, oily smoke in our homes. Our buildings also shake."

These nuisances may contribute to a progressive deterioration of local populations' quality of life, compounded by the loss of agricultural land linked to the plant's installation, compensated by amounts considered too low and inequitable.

Perceptions of project governance: between decision centralization and partial inclusion

The governance of the two Malicounda projects illustrates two distinct dynamics, revealing both progress and structural limitations.

The thermal plant, managed by the state through SENELEC, was characterized by strong centralization of decisions, limited community consultation, and a sense that the public hearings were "politicized," according to communities interviewed. They felt that their voices carried no weight in the initial decision-making, which generated tensions around the legitimacy of the representatives consulted. Additionally, communities raised concerns about a lack of transparency regarding the municipality's use of local royalties and the recruitment process, feeding persistent mistrust.

The solar plant introduced a more collaborative governance model. The signing of a notarized agreement, the establishment of monthly monitoring committees, and the creation of an employment and entrepreneurship committee represent innovations in participation and accountability. The commune's institutional presence in project governance, notably through chairing the board of directors, marks a step forward in decentralizing benefits and local control. However, this inclusion remains partial, according to communities interviewed. Consultations were late, certain key commitments have not yet been implemented, and limited access to information about the project's nature and expected benefits increases the risk of frustration and community disengagement.

In both cases, focus group participants noted that women and youth remain largely underrepresented in decision-making processes and in direct economic benefits. Dialogue mechanisms alone are not sufficient to ensure equitable distribution of revenue and opportunities. Over the longer term, these governance gaps erode trust in energy projects and increase the risks of social conflict, territorial inequality, and capture of benefits by actors far removed from the areas of impact.



Visit of fish processing sites in Bargny, Senegal

The JETP: a necessary tool for the energy transition, but limited and not sufficiently inclusive

The communities and local authorities encountered in this study and during the sharing workshop understand the need to move away from fossil fuels toward renewables (whether solar or wind), and recognize the climate imperative of developing and scaling up clean energy in the energy sector. Across all four communes visited, the energy transition is broadly understood as a shift from a fossil fuel-dependent model toward cleaner, less polluting energy sources (solar, wind, biomass, etc.).

In all four communes, the transition is welcomed as a means of reducing the environmental and health impacts of polluting energy projects (coal, heavy fuel oil thermal, oil, gas) and of modernizing electricity access systems.

Communities do, however, demand a just transition, one rooted in local territories, with concrete benefits: access to affordable and sufficient energy, including for productive activities and cooking; the creation of sustainable jobs for local populations; and the development of basic social infrastructure accompanied by support for the economic activities of the most vulnerable, particularly women and young people in the communes hosting energy projects. Among all the communes visited, only Taïba Ndiaye provides productive energy to women potters through a gas kiln. In all other localities, farmers continue to use fossil fuels for agricultural work, and some neighbourhoods still lack electricity despite hosting energy plants.

All four communes want an accelerated energy transition, but refuse to have it happen without them, at the expense of their rights, or for the exclusive benefit of the companies operating the plants. The transition to renewables must not come at the cost of access to the electricity needed for economic development, nor generate social or environmental injustice in the shift to wind or solar energy.

Alongside this shared community understanding of and support for a just transition to clean energy, this study identified some commune-specific perceptions of the JETP, linked to each area's context, specific needs, and strategic interests.

Bargny

In Bargny, a degree of wariness persists toward advocacy for a clean break with fossil fuels, a consequence of communities' negative experience with the coal plant, which they view as a symbol of an energy policy fundamentally at odds with a transition to clean energy. Given its proximity to Dakar, which is the main hub of energy transition debates, awareness of the JETP remains partial in Bargny, often transmitted through civil society, in particular Lumière Synergie Développement (LSD). Communities also express strong rejection of using JETP funds to compensate for the coal plant's impacts. As one community leader put it: "We've heard about the JETP, but we don't understand what it is… The agreement was signed without the population really understanding what it entails." Focus group participants associate the energy transition with a necessary break from coal and denounce the incoherence of a transition that maintains the Bargny coal plant: "If we're talking about an energy transition, why keep investing in coal?"



Bargny coal plant, Senegal

Taïba Ndiaye

In Taïba Ndiaye, community actors and young leaders embrace the need for an energy model grounded in renewables: "We need to shift toward green, clean energies: solar, wind, biomass." However, strong mistrust persists toward a process perceived as centralized and technocratic. The JETP is virtually unknown in the area, known only to a handful of young people or community leaders who have heard of it, sometimes through civil society organizations such as CRADESC, a Senegalese think tank engaged in research and advocacy for communities' economic, social, and cultural rights, but without a clear understanding of its implications. This feeds a sense of exclusion from the decision-making process. The JETP must have decentralized institutional ownership in the communes hosting projects; it must take into account youth employment in project zones; and local governments must be adequately prepared for its implementation.



Annex Town Hall of Taiba Ndiaye, Senegal

Méouane

Unlike in the other communes, communities in Méouane demonstrate a more advanced understanding of the energy transition, thanks in part to organizations like Women In Mining, though they perceive it as incomplete. As implemented on the ground, the energy transition is seen as disconnected from people's needs, particularly in terms of access to energy that could improve agriculture, modernize women's cooking activities, and support productive electricity use. The JETP is, however, completely unknown in this area, by both the elected officials and the community members interviewed.

If this mechanism is to be implemented, it must be grounded in a territorialized transition model in which the energy produced directly supports the local economy, with genuine municipal involvement in governance.



Taiba Ndiaye wind power plant, Senegal

Malicounda

Malicounda, for its part, shows greater confidence in the clean energy transition process, thanks to the more structured contract negotiation that underpinned the solar project. Commitments there are clearly defined, legally supported upfront, and formally notarized, including a 5% equity stake, municipal leadership of the plant's board by a well-prepared team, and a periodic monitoring mechanism. Communities nonetheless continue to express strong expectations around inclusion. This more positive perception stems from the strong capacity of municipal authorities to play their role in the project negotiation process, supported by the mayor's personal engagement and the backing of civil society organizations such as Enda Energie, a Senegalese NGO that supports communities through energy transition and sustainable development processes.



Fish processing site in Bargny, Senegal

Awareness of the JETP: a broader finding

Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD), an organization that conducts research, capacity building, and advocacy to defend the rights of communities affected by development projects and to promote transparency and accountability in these processes, perceives the energy transition as an opportunity for territorial development, but notes that it still requires strengthened inter-municipal cooperation and local governance mechanisms to generate greater added value and broader community wealth.

Overall, awareness of the JETP remains very low, and communities' expectations centre on universal electricity access, recognition of their rights, and support for municipalities.

Outreach on the JETP at community level is feasible, in large part owing to the Senegalese government's inclusive approach to the JETP development process. Over the past two years, the government has integrated consultation and co-construction into the JETP investment plan through information and document-sharing sessions with the PACTEJ platform. This process has considerably improved access to information for national civil society and its capacity to engage the government on governance issues, notably transparency and inclusivity.

Finally, interviews consistently found that the communes hosting energy projects and local governments, who are central actors in the transition, appear to remain on the margins of national strategy discussions. This finding confirms our previous work, which identified three priority areas for restoring trust and ensuring the JETP's success:

Institutionalized inclusion: systematically involving local governments and community representatives in JETP planning and monitoring bodies.

Transparency: disseminating accessible, plain-language information on the JETP's objectives, financing, and implications, in order to correct information asymmetries, combat mistrust, and preempt conflict.

Tangible local benefits: ensuring that the energy transition benefits host communities first, through local electrification, access to clean productive and cooking energy, support for agriculture and small and medium-sized enterprises, the creation of sustainable jobs, and respect for contractual commitments.

Communities and local governments demand concrete benefits from energy projects

Senegal's ongoing energy transition projects are confronting the realities of the ground in their development and operational phases, and these must serve as lessons learned for all stakeholders, particularly the government, project operators, and financing institutions.

The experience of the mining sector shows that an environmental clearance alone does not guarantee sound project implementation. Areas hosting solar and wind plants are no exception, with negative externalities capable of affecting neighbouring populations.

Indeed, on the basis of communities' lived experiences and complaints, it is fair to say that renewable energy does not automatically translate into social acceptance, local benefits, or a reduction of socio-economic and environmental grievances.

From Bargny to Malicounda, through Taïba Ndiaye and Méouane, communities and local authorities have identified structural factors that shaped the perceived success or failure of energy projects.



Fish processing site in Bargny, Senegal

In the territories, energy projects intensify women's vulnerabilities while restricting their access to economic benefits

Across all sites visited, women emerge as the primary victims of the negative externalities associated with energy projects.

In Bargny, the coal plant appears to have deepened the precarity of women fish processors by undermining their fish processing activities, reducing their income and economic autonomy.

In Malicounda, the thermal plant triggered environmental and agricultural land degradation, depriving women of their traditional livelihoods, particularly subsistence farming, without offering them suitable employment alternatives.

In Méouane and Taïba Ndiaye, where solar and wind projects predominate, the negative externalities take a different form: land grabbing reduces women's access to smallholder farming while deepening their economic dependence. Meanwhile, the jobs created by these projects (security, cleaning, maintenance) remain largely inaccessible to women, due to the absence of specific recruitment mechanisms or training provisions. This marginalization reinforces gender inequalities in the distribution of local benefits.

Finally, a cross-cutting finding emerges from all four communes: the promised social returns (financial support, infrastructure, community projects) rarely benefit women's groups directly. Women are largely absent from consultation and negotiation processes, which limits their capacity to defend their interests. Regardless of the technological diversity of the projects (coal, thermal, solar, wind), women share the same reality: they bear the losses, in health, environment, and land, without fully sharing in the socio-economic gains.

Malicounda shows that genuine local engagement can facilitate a just and inclusive energy transition with real benefits for communities and local governments

Among all the communes visited, Malicounda, despite still requiring improvements to its governance framework, particularly regarding community participation, stands out as a model and a learning case in terms of real impact for communities, particularly through the solar plant.

Good practices do exist in the other communes, including the establishment of a concertation framework in Méouane following social tensions and the social investments made in Taïba Ndiaye.

Nonetheless, the engagement of local authorities in Malicounda remains unmatched, and has been a decisive factor in enabling communities and local governments to benefit from the energy transition. Their strong involvement in the negotiation process, embodied by the mayor's leadership, and their monitoring of certain social investments (even if more limited) has allowed multiple dimensions of community life to benefit.

The Malicounda case demonstrates that genuine engagement by local authorities in governance can help tip the balance of energy project impacts in a positive direction: by strengthening institutional and negotiating capacity, by improving community electricity access, by creating economic and social opportunities, and by establishing an effective public-private partnership framework that serves a just and equitable transition.

However, this contractual framework alone is not sufficient to ensure that companies honour their commitments to communities. In this regard, the government could consider improving the legal framework for corporate social responsibility, for instance by establishing a CSR guarantee fund with the Caisse de Dépôt et de Consignation, modelled on the existing environmental rehabilitation fund, to compel companies to honour their commitments to local governments.

Recommendations

For the central government (ministries of energy, environment, local government, and finance)

- Propose, require, and publish standardized, legally binding investment contracts: The government should support the development of a standard contract for energy projects and require the full publication (or at minimum the CSR annexes, payment schedules, and dispute clauses) of operating agreements and memoranda of understanding, in order to prevent opacity, facilitate oversight, and limit misuse of developer interventions in communes.
- Strengthen the legal and technical capacity of local governments: The government should revise the local government code to give communes greater power and to provide for their participation in the negotiation of projects located in their territory. The code should also be brought into coherence with the various existing laws (energy, mining, environment, local content, etc.) that have a direct bearing on the potential economic and environmental impacts on communities.
- Condition project approval on a territorial integration plan: All project approvals at the siting stage should be made conditional on such a plan, and operators should be required to align their plans with the local development plans of the communes, validated jointly by local authorities and communities, in order to avoid misaligned planning processes and ensure priority allocation of royalties to local needs.
- Impose fiscal and contractual obligations on financiers and private banks: The government should require funders and private banks to include project suspension clauses in cases of non-compliance (for example regarding environmental disclosure), alongside the creation of a local escrow account for royalties, creating contractual pressure on developers to honour their CSR commitments.
- Reform compensation scales and land mechanisms: The government should update and harmonize compensation rates to reflect local market values and community income losses, and integrate supplementary compensation linked to production losses and land reclassification, in order to reduce land disputes and the risk of litigation.

For local governments (municipalities)

- Strengthen local governments' legal and technical capacity before project negotiations begin: Local governments should systematically call on legal counsel and independent consultants (independent EIA assessors, land valuators) before signing any agreement, budget these services, and secure partial reimbursement through financiers, in order to avoid unequal cessions and to build negotiating leverage.
- Establish legally mandated local multi-stakeholder committees: Municipalities should create a multi-stakeholder committee (municipality, CSOs, women, youth, operator, state) with a written mandate, a public calendar, and the right to access minutes and reports, in order to prevent the creation of inoperative and exclusive committees.
- Take control of land registers and local domain records: Municipalities should establish a cadastre and register of affected plots, notarized contracts, and beneficiary lists for compensation payments (anonymized if necessary), in order to prevent unjust expropriations and ensure payment traceability.

For operators and developers (SENELEC, Solaria/Senergy, Tobene, ICS, wind farms)

- Formalize and fund a binding local development programme: Operators should inscribe in a notarized contract a roadmap with measurable indicators in the areas of local workforce training, infrastructure, operational CSR, and priority local electrification. Operators should also guarantee that a portion of royalties is held in an escrow account, released upon achievement of local development programme targets.
- Develop a mandatory training and sustainable employability programme: Operators and developers should invest in a skills development plan for local populations (apprenticeships, energy technician diplomas) to convert employment quotas into real jobs during plant operation.
- Establish operational environmental mitigation monitoring mechanisms: Developers should continuously measure environmental nuisance risks (filters, dust suppression, track compaction, emissions control), develop operational reforestation programmes with publicly disclosed schedules, and establish an environmental monitoring mechanism subject to independent audit.
- Demonstrate financial transparency and local governance: Operators, in concert with the government, should transfer royalties locally, publish annual local CSR and financial reports, and establish a CSR foundation with mixed governance (community, civil society, operator, state), in order to combat diversions of funds and reinforce project legitimacy.

For civil society and community groups

- Strengthen awareness-raising, training, and community mobilization on the key themes of the energy transition and the JETP.
- Strengthen community and local government capacity for citizen oversight and project documentation: CSOs should support participatory data collection (community complaints mechanisms, health and environmental incident registers, etc.) and the formation of women's and youth committees for project negotiation and monitoring, in order to build a counterweight capable of demanding accountability.
- Support local governments on legal and technical matters and in strategic mobilization: CSOs should provide support for targeted legal recourse by local governments and communes (e.g. recovery of royalties, contract challenges, etc.) and for contract negotiations.
- Develop early warning and anticipation mechanisms in project host areas, and take into account the history of the territories, traditional knowledge, and community organizational patterns.

For financiers, financial institutions, and international partners

- Condition project financing on compliance with social, environmental, transparency and accountability policies.
- Require the production and publication of independent social and environmental audits at each project phase, and full transparency of contracts, royalties, and monitoring mechanisms.
- Link disbursements to verifiable compliance with mitigation measures and commitments regarding compensation and resettlement of affected communities.
- Allocate a dedicated share of financing to the development of certified vocational training for young people and women in occupations linked to energy value chains.
- Finance technical support mechanisms for local governments (legal, urban planning, energy governance) to strengthen their capacity to negotiate, monitor, and oversee energy projects in their territories.
- Support the documentation, capitalization, and dissemination of good practices in local governance, social accountability, and inclusive energy transition within national and international JETP frameworks.

Conclusion

Senegal stands at a strategic crossroads: the promise of a just energy transition, as embodied by the JETP, cannot materialize without a fundamental transformation in how energy projects are designed, financed, and implemented at the local level. The case studies in this brief, from Bargny to Méouane and from Taïba Ndiaye to Malicounda, highlight the persistent gaps between stated ambitions and the realities experienced by communities.

They demonstrate that the success or failure of an energy project depends not only on the technology or the volume of investment, but above all on the quality of governance, the transparency of processes, inclusion, and the effective guarantee of the rights of affected populations.

The energy transition cannot be reduced to a technocratic or institutional discourse disconnected from local territories. It must be lived, felt, and co-constructed with those most directly concerned: the communities that host the projects. These populations expect tangible benefits (direct electricity access, decent jobs, support for productive activities, concrete social investments), not deferred promises or symbolic compensation for real losses. Their involvement cannot be limited to belated, formal consultations: it must be structured, anticipated, and supported.

This brief calls for a rethinking of the current approach: giving local governments the legal, technical, and financial means to negotiate equitably with investors; integrating social, environmental, and accountability clauses into contracts; establishing community monitoring and oversight mechanisms; and inscribing local employment quotas and innovative forms of capital participation.

It also means breaking with the extractive logic that has negatively marked previous cycles of energy development, and making each project an opportunity for structural transformation, reduction of territorial inequalities, and strengthening of local democracy.

For Senegal and the JETP's technical and financial partners, this transition cannot be driven solely from capitals or international headquarters. It must rest on a fine-grained understanding of local dynamics, on real investment in strengthening the capacity of local governments, and on strong political will to condition financing on measurable social and environmental outcomes.

This also requires a renewed governance approach, one centred on transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility among all stakeholders at every stage of the project cycle.

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