

KAYAR MOOR – TRANSCRIPTION (ENGLISH)

00:00:00

Julie: Ok. So, we're good to start.

Reporter (man): No, this is good for the video. This is really good.

Julie: Alright.

Reporter (man): Ok. Perfect.

Julie: Yes, it's good. Well. May I? Ok. First of all, I have to inform you that everything we're about to discuss in this interview may be released, in whole or in part, in an internet video or in broadcast media, anywhere in the world. So, I would like to confirm with you that you agree with these conditions.

Mor Mbengue: Alright.

Julie: So, what's your name and what's your position?

Mor Mbengue: My name is Mor Mbengue. I am the coordinator of the Taxawu Cayar collective against the establishment of the fishmeal factory. At the same time, I am the coordinator of CLPA, a resource management organization that brings together all the stakeholders of the fishing industry.

Julie: Let's start by talking about the factory. Can you explain to us why you had to form this collective and what are the issues and the objectives?

Mor Mbengue: As soon as we learned of the establishment of a fishmeal factory in Kayar, we went to visit fishmeal factories in Mauritania or in Joul, very close to here. There, we saw the impact of these fishmeal factories. That is why we immediately said no to the establishment of this factory. A private hearing was held in a meeting room that could not hold more than two hundred people, even though our village has a population of over 26,000. We could see that this is not legal. So, we opposed it, and after this meeting we founded the collective with the people who opposed the establishment of this factory.

And, as the project was moving forward, everyone saw the impact that we were denouncing long before the factory was established. We protest against such impact.

Julie: What kind of impact?

Mor Mbengue: First of all, the nauseating odors coming from this factory, but also the wastewater that they discharge into the lake. It also impacts the resources, because these fishmeal factories encourage juvenile fishing, whereas Kayar's culture was to not fish juveniles. Now,

fishermen are starting to fish for juveniles, because the factory buys these juveniles. So, economically speaking, it's not good. But it has also impacted women fish processors.

Julie: How did it impact women fish processors?

Mor Mbengue: Because their livelihood is at stake. Since resources are getting scarce, women were processing fish for other industries. But now, if they pay 3,000 francs, the factory pays 6,000 francs for the same resources. Most of these women don't work anymore. There were 300 of them, now there are less than 110!

Julie: Let's talk about environmental issues. Have you often noticed problems when fishing, or spills into the lake?

Mor Mbengue: Problems started when they began dumping wastewater into the lake. This lake was useful for market gardeners as well as for breeders. The lake was also reinforcing the water well drilling process. It was reinforcing the drilling of drinking water wells. We noticed that the water started to smell bad, and this also caused cases of diarrhea and respiratory diseases, especially in children. Currently, the majority of the population is sick because of the odors coming from this factory, but also because of the impact on the water that we drink. It gives you an idea.

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Julie: Can you still drink this water?

Mor Mbengue: I don't drink tap water anymore. Most people no longer drink this water and have started to buy mineral water instead. So, it had an economic impact on households, because they now have to buy water instead of drinking tap water. Now, tap water is only used for washing clothes and bathing. But this water used to be good to drink. It was really safe to drink before this factory was built. But the factory has taken that water away from us.

Julie: And what did you do, as a collective?

Mor Mbengue: As a collective, we have organized demonstrations to oppose the establishment of this factory. We wrote to the administrative officials in the region, from the governor to the sub-prefect. We also wrote letters to the ministries of fisheries and environment, to say no to the establishment of this factory. But this was not followed up. Recently, we went to court to file a complaint against the fishmeal factory. The trial had started but we were dismissed for lack of evidence. Now we will have a trial on the merits.

Julie: So, you have done a lot?

Mor Mbengue: Yes, we have done a lot. And we filed a complaint for a trial on the merits. This was a formal trial to condemn the wastewater they discharge, etc. Now, we will talk about the substance of the case. How the factory came to be here, and what material and environmental damage it has caused.

Julie: And who will conduct the necessary expertise to assess this damage?

Mor Mbengue: As a collective, we have contacted specialists. These specialists know. They came to take samples, which were sent to laboratories, and these laboratories confirmed to us that what we were denouncing was real.

Julie: What are you hoping for, if you win in court? What would be the ideal solution?

Mor Mbengue: If we win in court, the factory will close and this will push us to be more vigilant on any new fishmeal factory that could harm our health in the future. This will also serve as a model at the national level for all the stakeholders of the fishing industry to preserve the resources and save money.

Julie: I have a somewhat provocative question. If the factory committed to not dumping wastewater and to not harming the environment, would that be acceptable or not?

Mor Mbengue: Here, there are five fish processing plants. They do not pose any problem to the population, because they do not emit foul odors, they do not target juveniles, and they do not destroy our livelihoods. This is not the case here. Even if they had established a milk processing factory, it wouldn't belong there anyway, because the factory is located in a subdivision meant for residential use. 1124 plots of land for residential use.

And because of the stench emitted by the factory, most people don't want to live there anymore. One person had a house built there. A month after moving in, he left the house. It's not a good place to live. So, one person deprives 1200 families of their land. This is not acceptable. Even if they had made a milk factory, it would not belong in that subdivision.

Julie: Right. There are other factories in Senegal...

Reporter (man): Julie, can you step back a little bit, and look towards the camera?

Julie: Ok. Alright. Right. Sorry. Can you hear me? There are other factories in Senegal that don't do the harm that this factory does.

Mor Mbengue: I'm not talking about these. I'm talking about Kayar. There are other factories in Kayar. Even these factories have an impact. Any industrial plant has some negative impact, but this impact is measurable. But in the case of the Barna factory, we cannot even quantify the damage caused at the local level. As I was saying earlier: the odors emitted, the air pollution and the discharge of wastewater.

00:10:23

Julie: I also wanted to talk about the impact on fishery, which you mentioned earlier.

Reporter (man): I want this kid to move. Can we ask him to get out of the frame? Move over there a little bit? And be quiet. That's it.

Julie: Poor boy!

Reporter (man): We're good.

Julie: So, I wanted to ask about the impact on fishery. Because you said earlier that the factory promotes juvenile fishing. Can you explain why this is a problem?

Mor Mbengue: Before the establishment of this factory, we did not use to fish juveniles. But now, the factory favors juvenile fishing. The juveniles are easier to catch, but nobody would buy them. Now, since this factory has been established, many people buy these juveniles, to supply them to the fishmeal factory. This has pushed the fishermen to fish the juveniles. We cannot talk about a better future and good resource management if we kill and exploit the juveniles.

Julie: And why does the factory want these juveniles?

Mor Mbengue: No, they don't target juveniles directly. But if the fishermen bring juveniles, they will buy them. That's why the fishermen started to fish juveniles. If they didn't push us, we wouldn't catch the juveniles. But since there are not many resources, we are forced to fish the juveniles. This can only encourage juvenile fishing.

Julie: Here in Kayar, what proportion of the population lives from fishery?

Mor Mbengue: The population of Kayar is 26,000, and more than 75% of the population lives from fishery. More than 75%. The main industries here are fishery, market gardening, and trade. Fishery, market gardening and trade. But fishery dominates the other sectors by far. Fishery is therefore very important for the village of Kayar.

Julie: Do you think it will still be as important in the future? Will it change?

Mor Mbengue: I think it will change, because of the establishment of fishmeal factories that favor juvenile fishing and offshore fishing boats that plunder our resources. But also because of the fishing effort. Here in Senegal, how many fishing boats are there at the national level? While the stock is decreasing more and more, the fishing effort is really strong. Really strong. So, we really need to find mechanisms to create other jobs.

Because of this, almost half of the youth of this village prefer to emigrate, because you cannot stay in your own village, not being able to live decently, and live there still. It was for this reason that I myself decided to leave in 2006. I left Kayar on August 6 and arrived in the Canary Islands on August 15. I stayed in Spain for 36 days and then I was repatriated. But most of my family lives in Spain. They went there for a better future. Because the future of our jobs is insecure. Really, we can no longer live from fishery. For example, the fishing season used to last nine months. Now the fishing season lasts nine months, but you can't even fish for three months, because there are no fish. You can't live for a whole year if you only fish for three months!

Julie: What is the main cause of the lack of fish?

Mor Mbengue: The establishment of fishmeal factories that encourage juvenile fishing, and foreign boats that plunder our national resources. Chinese boats, Turkish boats and Russian boats come here to plunder our resources. Really, it prevents us from living decently.

00:15:00

Julie: And when you go out by boat to fish, do you see the foreign boats? Do you have any contact with them?

Mor Mbengue: Every time we go out to sea, there are conflicts with them.

Julie: Conflicts?

Mor Mbengue: Yes. When we are setting our longlines to fish, a boat comes and snags the longlines. This always leads to conflict.

Julie: And after that, can you mend the longline or not?

Mor Mbengue: No, you cannot mend it. It is ruined.

Julie: And how much is it worth?

Mor Mbengue: A longline costs more than 50,000 francs. We are impacted economically. We can't even live decently in our own village! How could we stay here? That's the reason why people emigrate to Spain.

Julie: So, you have four or five children.

Mor Mbengue: I have two boys and four girls. I have six children.

Julie: And if they tell you they want to take a boat to the Canary Islands, what would you say?

Mor Mbengue: I would accept.

Julie: Really?

Mor Mbengue: Yes. They are still in school, but if they ever decide to go to the Canary Islands, then I will let them go. I can't even get by with my own life, so how could I provide for them? They depend on me to live. We don't have a future here.

Julie: Aren't you afraid?

Mor Mbengue: Very afraid. I am very afraid because there is a growing scarcity of resources. The more time passes, the more we can see the growing scarcity of resources.

Julie: And in the long term, what would be the solution?

Mor Mbengue: To stop the establishment of any new fishmeal factory, to cancel all fishing agreements, but also to protect the resources, especially the juveniles, and nationalize the fish resources meant for national consumption, to ensure at least our own food needs.

Julie: Do you believe that there are some benefits to the fishing agreements or none at all?

Mor Mbengue: I cannot see these benefits. Maybe at the top of the State, for the politicians. But we, stakeholders of the fishing sector, we see nothing. There was no positive impact here. The impact for us has been negative.

Julie: Thank you very much. I'm done.

Reporter (man): I would like to ask one more question.

Julie: Ok, go ahead.

Reporter (man): Why does the government grant fishing licenses to big foreign ships? Do you have any idea? Is there a political motive behind this? And, when you answer, please look at Julie.

Julie: You understood.

Mor Mbengue: I don't think so. Because, to tell you the truth, I think that Senegal officials are thieves, because there is no transparency. We have always pushed the State of Senegal to follow regulations and be more transparent. We, as fishermen, native of a fishing village whose main activity is fishing, we ought to know which ships are authorized to fish in our waters, in Senegal. Recently, Greenpeace spotted a Russian boat passing through our waters, although Greenpeace has no official authority. The State of Senegal does not even have the power or the capacity to monitor our sea waters. So how could we agree with them regarding these matters? That would be like murdering ourselves.

Julie: What does the government say when they sign these agreements? How do they justify these?

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Mor Mbengue: That's why I speak of a lack of transparency. We, stakeholders, know nothing. Only the politicians know. And the CRODT, which is the marine study center, has indeed told us that the resources are overexploited. And since there is overexploitation, we should not have granted fishing licenses to other countries. If you don't have enough food, you shouldn't give others to eat. And we don't have enough stock. There are not enough fish here to share with the

rest of the world so we should not grant fishing licenses. Let's pay attention and we may understand what is going on. Maybe they want to line their pockets but they do not act in the interest of the fishermen.

This is why, every June, the majority of young people leave this country, through illegal emigration. Recently, some young people were repatriated, but that will not deter young people from leaving by any means. No, no, no. Even if they lose their lives at sea. Better lose your life at sea than to stay with your family until you die, before your parents. There's no shame about it. We are lions, and we are proud. We must try to preserve our resources, but if we don't succeed, we shall leave this country. Even if we lose our lives at sea, we will leave. For sure. If you were to make a street interview, you wouldn't find ten young people who want to stay here. Most of them want to leave.

Julie: Among these young returnees, were there any from here?

Mor Mbengue: I was repatriated.

Julie: No, you said that two weeks ago...

Mor Mbengue: No, they're not from here. And even if they were, they wouldn't show up, because they're doing this in secret. I know someone who was repatriated nine times.

Julie: Nine times?

Mor Mbengue: Nine times. And I know he will leave again.

Julie: Nine times! When was the last time?

Mor Mbengue: In 2019. And I know he will leave again.

Julie: And he always leaves by boat?

Mor Mbengue: I think he has left six times by boat, and he went to Morocco three times.

Julie: Then, by boat from Morocco? How did he leave Morocco?

Mor Mbengue: On an inflatable boat.

Julie: Maybe we'll talk to him sometime, there's a link with this topic. Alright, yes. I had a question in mind. Are you still able to eat fish?

Mor Mbengue: Fish? No. In 1996, I dropped out of school because there was an abundance of fish! Everyone was happy to be a fisherman! There were lots of fish, but nowadays you can't be a fisherman because there are no fish. Even for food, our daily portion of fish has decreased a lot. In the past, we used to eat more fish in one day than in a week now. We can go up to a week

without eating the portion that we used to eat daily, about ten years ago. Because there are no fish.

Julie: You don't eat the fish from here?

Mor Mbengue: It's not good for your health. We have to deal with it.

Julie: Is there a substitute for fish, like meat?

Mor Mbengue: No. Meat is very expensive! We are poor, we have no money. We have nothing.

Julie: What kind of fish did you use to eat?

[End of recording].