

# STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

## for off-shore oil & gas sector development in Senegal

Since 2014, large reserves of fossil fuel were found off the coast of Senegal. Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) offered opportunities to bring together the interests of different national and international actors. An interview with two key stakeholders who were closely involved in the SEA development process: Mr Papa Samba Ba and Mr Baba Drame.

The full article about the SEA for off-shore oil & gas sector development in Senegal is available in 'Strategic Environmental Assessment; Past, Practice, Prospects.'



## Interview with Mr Papa Samba Ba

February 2024



30 years Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment

### What motivates you as Hydrocarbons Director?

"My motivation comes from a sense of moral and strategic responsibility. Overseeing the strategic development of the large-scale oil and gas resources discovered in 2014 has many different aspects. It includes economic aspects and regulatory reforms. It covers environmental considerations that need to be safeguarded. It also entails organisational aspects of the administrations and entities that are responsible for monitoring and looking after the interests of the State of Senegal. This all together makes my work a real opportunity to serve my country."

**"A main takeaway from the whole process is that we need to strengthen ad hoc interministerial cooperation, in this sector and elsewhere."**

### How important is the oil and gas sector to Senegal?

The importance of the oil and gas sector for Senegal is manifold. Senegal, like many countries, has been exploring for oil since the 1950s.

These efforts bore fruit in 2014, when world-class discoveries were made. This discovery is directly in line with our country's development aspirations. Oil and gas resources are directly linked to opportunities for revenue and income, industrialisation,



**Mr Papa Samba Ba,**  
Hydrocarbons Director at the Senegalese Ministry of Energy

and the creation of new value chains. It is about opportunities for job creation and strategic and geopolitical positioning. Finally, this sector enables us to enforce our energy security, which allows us to address the issue of global energy access and improve the living conditions of our populations."

### **What are the main challenges or issues for the development of the oil sector in Senegal?**

"The main challenge is to effectively benefit from this new sector while maintaining the diversification of the Senegalese economy and protecting the environment. Like any country embarking on oil and gas today, Senegal must deal with challenges. We are addressing these challenges by learning from the positive and negative experiences of other countries.

First of all, we must guarantee our country's right to use these oil and gas resources to support its social and economic development. There is no question of leaving these resources in the ground on the pretext of climate change. The most detailed studies, particularly those by the IEA, show that if the entire African continent were to develop all its gas resources,

“ There is no question of leaving these resources in the ground on the pretext of climate change. ”

our climate impact would only increase from 3 to 3.4%. So clearly this is not a reason, at least not today, to prevent our countries from developing oil and gas resources, especially as we need them

for our positioning and economic development.

Another challenge is the adaptation of tools such as the legal framework for this new developing economy. Environmental protection, for example, requires oil and gas projects to be carried out to the highest environmental standards.

There is also the risk of disrupting our existing economy. These oil and gas projects should have a catalytic effect instead of deregulating our economy. In other words: we must prevent a 'Dutch disease'. And then there is the need of building the capacity of our teams at breakneck speed. We are learning by doing to meet all needs, capitalising on the experience of Senegalese nationals and people from the diaspora to rapidly strengthen the central administration and other relevant organisational entities. We must apply advanced technologies and unlock new finance flows to support this young economy. Technological and financial needs for building pipelines and gas networks, for developing upstream projects and for oil and gas extraction projects. There is also a challenge in managing the interfaces between the oil and gas sector and the fishing sector, which is an important sector of the Senegalese economy. I mean: our national dish Thieboudienne is entirely made of good fish! This must be preserved by any means!

Last but not least: we need to anticipate the energy transition. We are well aware of this in Senegal. The assets we need to build must be responsive to new and future energies so that they are not stranded assets. And this means we have to consider some reinvestments and adjustments to ensure that our gas

networks, power plants and other aspects of development can be used in a context where we move to grid zero or these energies of the future. In the midst of all these challenges, Senegal must forge its own path, its own itinerary. It is our principle, and we are fortunate, to learn from other countries. To consider their good practices, their bad practices, and above all their itineraries. "

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### **In what ways has strategic environmental assessment been instrumental to manage these challenges?**

"In many ways! Strategic environmental assessment provided us with a global reference on the main areas of concern for oil and gas exploitation. It also helped us to improve the dissemination of the results of ESAs to communities and other actors who do not have a high level of education and who would have difficulty mastering all these studies. It guided us in terms of carbon monetisation and in using fossil resources according to national climate commitments.

Thanks to SEA, it will be much easier to conduct environmental and social impact assessments (ESAs) at the level of specific projects, using the same framework. It assisted us in identifying regulatory gaps to better manage interfaces, for example between oil & gas and other sectors such as fishery and environmental protection.

Strategic environmental assessment is not a waste of time at all! To the contrary, it allowed us to take the concerns of stakeholders into account very early on, which really made it possible to defuse a lot of time-consuming complications that could arise during the execution of projects. I am convinced that our state should do this more often. Because it is not about economic development versus environmental conservation, but about managing all parameters properly. And to ensure that the interest of the immediate environment is properly brought together with those of the national and international community."

#### **How did SEA help to take into account the concerns of fishermen in particular?**

"The fishing sector has its own challenges that are independent of oil and gas activity. A lot of misunderstanding and misinterpretation exist on this point, from which, unfortunately, difficulties and disagreements can easily arise. I think this confusion needs to be cleared away very quickly. However, let me preface this by saying that oil and gas activity should in no way, in any case, be a negative or an aggravating factor for the fishing sector.

In any case, strategic environmental assessment helped us to establish better coordination and understanding between offshore oil and gas and fisheries' stakeholders. It allowed us to adopt an inclusive approach and invite key players, such

as the Minister of Fisheries into the process. This integration made it possible to provide the right information to fishermen, but also the include their interests and concerns."

#### **During the process, the decision was made to establish an interministerial working group to manage the strategic environmental assessment. What do you think of that?**

"I think nothing but good things about it! One of the challenges I mentioned earlier was the need for organisational and institutional reform to govern the sector. 'New issue, new organisation', so to say. To be able to make use of specific expertise and competencies, we have to strengthen our inter-ministerial cooperation and break the silos. In the case of the SEA for the offshore oil and gas sector, this was about bringing the Hydrocarbons department together with the environmental department and to welcome other stakeholders such as the fishing and maritime authorities. Hence the decision for establishing an inter-ministerial working group. Thanks to this important establishment, our teams capitalised more and more on the benefits of multidisciplinary work in a multi-stakeholder group. This cross-link also translates into the effectiveness of what is achieved. A main takeaway from the whole process is that we need to strengthen inter-ministerial cooperation, in this sector and elsewhere."

#### **How do you look back on the work done so far? Any achievements that stand out?**

"It is a long-term job, that is not yet finished. Later, we will take stock and can be proud, depending on whether it is generally positive. And if there are also negative points, that is the time to learn from them. However, we have made progress in reforming the legal and political framework to adapt to this new economy. We have been very active in this area with the revision of the petroleum code, the adoption of the local content law (note editor: to ensure that the local population will benefit from the project beyond the revenues), the law on the distribution of hydrocarbon's revenues, the revision of the environment law, and reforms in the maritime sector to take into account issues related to petroleum aspects.

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I think we can be proud of having teams that are committed, that don't count their efforts and sacrifices, and that are motivated by this patriotic impulse to oversee the development of the sector and protect the interests of the State. I am proud of them, and the Senegalese nation should be too."



Photo: Erkut Acar

# Interview with Mr Baba Drame

February 2024



## What motivates you as Environment Director?

**Mr Baba Drame:** "According to the Constitution of the Republic of Senegal, every Senegalese citizen has the right to a healthy environment. I want to help make this a reality. Environmental issues used to be dealt with in laws and regulations. His Excellency the President of the Republic wanted to make a healthy environment a constitutional right. What motivates me is to put this State's desire in practice. As the Director of the Environment and the State's technical arm, it is my responsibility to implement the government's policy on combating environmental degradation and protecting people and nature from pollution and nuisance."

**"It makes me proud that the Senegalese government, from the outset, has been determined to integrate the environmental and social dimension into oil and gas development."**

## How important is the oil and gas sector to Senegal?

"Having oil and gas in the country offers Senegal new opportunities to promote its emergence and socio-economic development. The oil and gas bill has always weighed heavily on Senegal's balance of trade. Since our independence, Senegal has imported most of its energy,

whether oil, gas, or coal, so the discovery of these strategic resources in 2014 on our territory offers Senegal the opportunity to reverse the trend of dependence. I think this discovery is a godsend for the country!

Obviously, in addition to the energy aspect, there are other economic opportunities. Gas today can be used not only to promote industrial



**Mr Baba Drame,**  
Director of the Environment and Classified Establishments

development, but also to create a new value chain, a new industry based on petrochemicals. This will create jobs and wealth for the entire Senegalese population. We need to supply the domestic market first, and then look at the possibility of exporting the remaining resources. This is because the deposits are too big to be consumed exclusively by Senegal.

“ We need to supply the domestic market first, and then look at the possibility of exporting the remaining resources. ”

That is why we need to think about opportunities offered in the sub-regional and international markets. The authorities have now put in place a whole regulatory framework so that these resources can be exploited in the exclusive interest of the Senegalese people."

#### **What makes you proud when you think of the work you've done in the oil and gas sector?**

"It makes me proud that the Senegalese government, from the outset, has been determined to integrate the environmental and social dimension into oil and gas development. The President of the Republic personally initiated a national conference on sustainable development every year. Even before oil and gas production began, we organised the third National Conference on Sustainable Development, focused on oil and gas production from a sustainable development perspective.

All projects authorised by the State from the Grand Tortue Ahmeyim gas field shared with Mauritania to the Sangomar offshore oil field, have undergone an in-depth environmental and social impact assessment. These ESIs are validated by national experts from administration and universities and the directly affected populations. This shows once again that all the authorities are fully aware of the potential impacts that oil and gas development can have on our environment and our society, and that the State has taken all the appropriate measures to ensure that these risks can be avoided, mitigated, or compensated for. This altogether makes me proud. "

#### **What are the main challenges or issues for the development of the sector in Senegal?**

"First of all, we need to avoid the national economy becoming totally dependent on the oil and gas sector and creating an uncertain future for our country, especially as there is now increasing talk of moving away from the oil and gas era. We used the experience of the Netherlands to ensure that oil and gas development will take place in close harmony with other social and economic activities that are important for Senegal.

“ First of all, we need to avoid the national economy becoming totally dependent on the oil and gas sector. ”

The other challenge, which I also consider to be extremely important, is exploiting the development potential

of the oil and gas sector. The government is working on this challenge by taking legislative and regulatory measures. I am referring to the Local Content Act, aiming to ensure greater involvement of local players in this new economy. This law is important as it enables us to address the risk of sidelining national companies, that also need to benefit from the opportunities offered by oil and gas development."

#### **How has Strategic Environmental Assessment helped Senegal to meet these challenges?**

"In my view, SEA is of vital importance for the oil and gas sector. It is good to carry out individual impact studies for each project, but I think it's much more important to move towards an environmental policy that will enable us to manage the impact of the whole sector. The oil wells that are being drilled are located along the Senegalese coastline. The first thing right now is to identify the major environmental and social challenges posed by oil and gas development and to address them when formulating policies and programmes.

If decision-makers integrate the environmental dimension at that point, it becomes much easier for us to take them into account when formulating projects and programmes. In that case, ESIs become the operational implementation of the policies and strategies that the State has put in place. The multi-stakeholder validation of the SEA helps the government to have a clearer picture of the environmental and social issues involved in oil and gas development.

Accordingly, these issues can be incorporated into oil and gas development projects."

### **How has the SEA process helped to resolve the challenges in the fisheries sector?**

"The environmental impact most feared by the local population, is that these oil and gas activities in a maritime environment will have a very negative impact on fisheries resources, particularly on fishing. That's why, in the north of Senegal as well as in the Saint-Louis area, fishing is the main activity of the local population. Oil and gas are currently being exploited here. Therefore, a monitoring and warning system is being put in place to ensure that oil and gas activities do not have a negative impact on fishing. These measures were included in the environmental and social management plan of the environmental assessments."

### **What strategic decisions has the SEA enabled you to make?**

"First of all, strategic environmental assessment enabled us to incorporate the oil and gas development dimension into the revised environmental code. The second strategic decision coming out of this SEA is the facilitation of institutional capacity building and dialogue through the interministerial group. This platform brings together all relevant information and skills and

builds the capacity of its members and therefore ensures much more effective management of oil and gas activities. It offers the opportunity to talk to experts from several areas and to agree upon the best options for the State to develop this sector. Thirdly, SEA helps us to take environmental and social considerations into account in policies and programmes relating to oil and gas development."

### **What do you think of the guidelines drawn up during the SEA process?**

Without guidelines, we would try to steer a boat without a rudder or a compass, right? These guidelines are the levers that enable us today to know where to put our feet when it comes to making decisions about oil and gas management.

“ Without guidelines, we would try to steer a boat without a rudder or a compass, right? ”

### **How was this set of guidelines received by the Prime Minister?**

"I haven't yet had the opportunity to discuss it directly with him, but I do know that environmental issues are perfectly well integrated into the Prime Minister's supervision of the sector. In fact, when the Prime Minister makes speeches or statements on oil and gas, he never misses an opportunity to point out

the imperative need to include the environmental and social dimension of oil and gas activity. I believe that this is nothing other than a reflection of the highly strategic vision that the Senegalese government has of the need to deal efficiently with the environmental and social consequences of oil and gas activity. Let me add this: if today's issues such as avoiding the discharge of waste into the sea are dealt with at a very high level, it is thanks to all these guidelines that have been produced. These guidelines are shared with all the ministerial departments, precisely informing them, and enabling them to take the most appropriate measures to awaken everyone to their responsibilities."

### **What are you planning to do next when it comes to these guidelines?**

"Some things are being discussed at the level of the interministerial group. Our aim today is to make them public, just as we have made public all the environmental assessments that have been carried out in the oil and gas sector. In that way, people can access this information, researchers can access it, and all development players, civil society and the private sector can access this information and needs. For the moment, these guidelines are confidential documents. These guidelines could, for example, be incorporated into the decrees and orders implementing the new Environmental Code."

### **How do you envision the future of SEA in Senegal?**

"SEA simply is essential. Whether we like it or not, decisions can no longer be taken without an environmental assessment.



Photo: Leonardo Viti

Our Constitution clearly states that all projects, programmes, plans and policies likely to have an impact on the environment must undergo an environmental assessment. These are the provisions of our fundamental law, supplemented by other sectoral laws such as the mining code, the environment code, the oil code and the gas code. All these legislative provisions now require environmental assessment.

Also, the requirements of development partners who finance development projects and programmes in Senegal, such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the United Nations, demand an environmental assessment before financing a development project. This means that the environmental assessment as a whole has a very good future. Now, I think we need to support this

momentum around environmental assessment, by building the capacity of the players involved so that they are in a position to implement it. This is an extremely important strategic lever for promoting sustainable development."

#### **That is a high level of ambition!**

"Indeed. You see, when you carry out a strategic environmental assessment, it's like getting rid of the cockroaches. But you know, to improve our way of doing things, to leave future generations a viable world, a viable Senegal, we have to bring out all the difficulties, to

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propose measures for managing environmental and social risks. We don't have a very good grasp of environmental issues, but I think that with the provisions I mentioned earlier, in particular the Senegalese Constitution, which now requires us to take account of the environmental dimension in all policies, we have a good basis."

#### **Can you sum up your experience with environmental impact assessment in one sentence?**

"Strategic environmental and social assessment, the basis for sustainable development in Senegal."

I think that if we don't have SEA, we'll be talking about sustainable development in Senegal, but that will remain wishful thinking."

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

**Papa Samba Ba** is an economic engineer specialised in energy and processes. He is the Director of Hydrocarbons under the Minister of Petroleum and Energy. He previously worked with the Institut Français du Pétrole, Energies Nouvelles Group, as a process engineer and then as a Project Manager for multinationals in

the energy sector. Within the Ministry, he works mainly on issues related to safeguarding national technical and economic interests in upstream projects, implementing and monitoring the gas-to-power and gas-to-industries strategies, providing the technical support needed for reforms in the

sector, etc. Finally, as the issues of energy transition are particularly closely intertwined with the oil and gas projects he monitors, he pays particular attention to them, especially in the context of tightening global climate constraints.

**Mr Baba Drame** is an environmentalist and has been Director of the Environment and Classified Establishments since 2019, after having held various positions in this department at both regional and national level. With the International Labour Office (ILO), Mr Drame coordinated the United

Nations Partnership for Action on the Green Economy (PAGE) between 2014-2016. He also played a leadership role in waste management as lead expert at the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) in 2018. Mr Drame holds a Diplôme d'Etudes a Master's degree in Integrated Management and Sustainable

Development of Coastal Zones and several certificates obtained from the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the ILO's International Training Centre (CIF) in Turin, in the fields of the green economy, climate change diplomacy and sanitation.