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The Casamance Conflict and its Displaced Persons : An Overview

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Abstract

The natural region of Casamance has been hit hard by an armed conflict between the (separatist) Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) and the Senegalese army. For more than 30 years, the natural region of Casamance has been plunged into a situation of "neither war nor peace", which has caused social instability in certain areas where repeated clashes and episodic violence maintain the status quo of permanent insecurity that prevents people from exploiting their fields and forest resources. This situation has favoured a massive displacement of the populations to other places where they will be faced with a situation of social and economic insecurity which demonstrates the need for permanent adaptation. On the basis of a series of long-term surveys carried out between 2014 and 2018, this article attempts to take stock of the situation of these displaced people in Casamance.

Keyword : Casamance, conflict, displaced, no return, integration.

Introduction

A combination of social and political factors led to the frustration of a section of the Casamance population, which was the basis for the outbreak of the rebellion in Casamance. This resulted in an increase in clashes between rebels belonging to the MFDC who are actively demanding independence for the region and the Senegalese army, which is determined to curb any armed resistance in order to maintain law and order. In addition to having led to the death of many civilians and the destruction of villages, these clashes have left some villages in a situation of insecurity that reflects the dramatic nature of a conflict that, due to its complexity, resists the many crisis exit strategies undertaken so far by the Senegalese state and civil society actors. It is in this context that thousands of people have had to leave their homes to flee the clashes and the risks associated with the planting of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines. They settled in villages and towns in Casamance where they faced the problem of social adaptation and economic integration. This article will present a detailed overview of the situation of those displaced by the conflict in Casamance by first deciphering the contextual elements that led to the displacement of these populations. Secondly, we will look at the problem of population displacement in Casamance, focusing on the reasons for displacement and the problems of socio-economic integration. Finally, we will examine the motivations expressed by certain displaced persons to justify their desire not to return.

1. Methodology

The material mobilised in this article stems from a series of field surveys carried out in Casamance between 2014 and 2018 with a cohort of more than twenty (20) displaced people. Our methodological approach was built by establishing a relationship of trust with our interviewees, which allowed us to conduct semi-structured interviews, observations and to collect, in turn, a series of testimonies from displaced persons thanks to an iterative approach and the search for empirical saturation. Semi-structured interviews and observations complemented each other during all phases of our fieldwork, allowing us to inscribe our epistemological position in a socio-anthropological approach (Olivier De Sardan, 2008). These approaches are the only ones, it seems to us, that allow us to take stock of the situation of the displaced in Casamance. To avoid any bias, the interviews were usually conducted in Wolof and then translated into French.

2. Background information

2.1 Casamance: The oldest armed conflict in the West African sub-region

For more than 30 years, Casamance has been the scene of an armed conflict between the separatist movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) and the Senegalese army. The origins of the conflict date back to December 1982, following a peaceful march organised by the MFDC towards the government of Ziguinchor. Dominique Darbon (1984) goes into great detail about the absolutely peaceful nature of this march. This march was subsequently repressed in a bloody manner by the Senegalese authorities, who also made numerous arrests, including that of the leader of the movement at the time, Abbé Augustin Diamacoune Senghor. The military repression forced the independence fighters, whose leaders were arrested, to withdraw from the city. Thus, they crossed the rice fields and took refuge in the villages and forests of the lower Casamance where the density of the vegetation cover and the much tighter hydraulic network offered them a naturally strategic base (Marut, 2010). Sympathisers and supporters of the movement hid in this forest in order to set up a rebel movement to secede from Senegal and claim independence for Casamance. Initially armed with cutlasses, spears and handmade rifles, over the years the rebels acquired weapons and artillery that enabled them to fight against the Senegalese army in the region in order to "liberate Casamance from Senegalese colonial rule". In the wake of this, the independentists organised themselves and set up (in 1983) an armed wing called 'Atika' which, under the leadership of Sidy Badji (a veteran of the French army and the Senegalese army) and Salif Sadio, led the guerrilla war against the Senegalese army (Marut, 2010). In the years that followed, the war, which took hold mainly in the Ziguinchor region, had many consequences both from a socio-economic point of view and in terms of the preservation of the rule of law. It was in such circumstances that the movement that started in the city of Ziguinchor spread to the countryside, particularly in Lower Casamance, where a real rebellion took hold (Diédhiou, 2011).

2.2 The Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance: from a regionalist party defending the interests of Casamance in Senegal to an independence movement

As some reflections show, "*before serving as a framework for independence demands, the MFDC was a pacifist regionalist party whose political history remains linked to the socio-political realities of Senegal during the colonial period. It is true that this movement was not one of the most important political formations in the national political arena, but its territorial anchorage in Casamance is an obvious reality*" (Sene, 2018 : 138). Indeed, when French West Africa (AOF) was formed, the principles of citizenship were applied in two zones: the inhabitants of the four communes (Dakar, Rufisque, Gorée and Saint-Louis), who enjoyed the same rights as the metropolitan population, and the subjects, the inhabitants of the other terroirs or cercles, who were subject to the code of indigénat. According to Mohamed Lamine Manga (2014), this situation was the source of all sorts of abuses, stigmatising the inhabitants of the cercles and pushing them into withdrawal and a form of identity-based resistance that was exclusive of the system itself and all those who came close to it. These frustrations were put to good use by the local elites from the cercles who set up regionalist parties to demand that the interests of the terroirs be better taken into account. Thus, like the UGOVAF (General Union of Originals from the River Valley) in the river valley and the UDRSO (Democratic Union of Nationals of Eastern Senegal) in eastern Senegal, the MFDC was created in 1947 to press for the demands of the Casamance populations, with the aim of aligning the status of their terroir with that of the other districts of Senegal (Roche, 2011). Thanks to its territorial anchorage, this movement was decisive in the political recompositions that were to take place when Senghor initiated the break with the SFIO (French section of the Workers' International) and founded the BDS (Senegalese Democratic Bloc) in 1948 (Eichelsheim, 1991).

It was a major player in national and regional politics, allying itself with Senghor's BDS in the elections of 1948, 1951 and 1952, until its dissolution into the Senghorian party in 1954. Following the scuttling of the primitive MFDC, the party disappeared from the local and national political scene. However, in 1982, a new organisation was born thanks to the activism of Abbé Diamacoune and took over the name of the MFDC. Far from the orientations of the original MFDC, the 1982 MFDC led an armed rebellion against the Senegalese state to demand the independence of Casamance. For several years and until his death on 17 January 2007, the main leader was Abbé Augustin Diamacoune Senghor. "*A leading figure in the movement, twice imprisoned for his political propaganda activities in favour of Casamance independence, he was the first Secretary General of the MFDC. He was the signatory of most of the peace agreements concluded between the movement and the government of Senegal. He spent the last years of his life trying to unify the movement so that the peace agreements signed could be respected and peace returned to Casamance*" (Ngom, 2018: 56). Currently, the MFDC is a fragmented movement with several rebel leaders, each of whom claims autonomy for Casamance. One of the current charismatic figures of the MFDC is Salif Sadio. He is known for his drastic and virulent positions. He has always tried to make the public understand that efforts to restore peace in Casamance could not succeed without him and his men.

Leading a very important faction of the movement in the north of the region, César Atoute Badiate is the commander of the armed troops and the real warlord of the MFDC. He is behind most of the exactions and attacks orchestrated by the movement in the region. Finally, the Secretary General, Mamadou Nkrumah Sané, who has been under an international arrest warrant since 1997, has been in exile in Paris for more than twenty years. He leads the MFDC's external wing and proclaimed himself secretary general of the movement after the death of Augustin Diamacoune Senghor, without the consent of the other rebel leaders. Because of the differences between the various rebel leaders, the MFDC has been fragmented for several years. Indeed, one of the main warlords who leads a faction of the separatist movement in the north of the region, Salif Sadio, has seen his dominance challenged by the other rebel leaders, in particular by César Atoute Badiate who leads the northern wing of the movement. At the same time, the authority of Mamadou Nkrumah Sané was challenged by Salif Sadio. An examination of these internal rivalries shows the dissension between the various rebel leaders and the fragmented nature of the MFDC since the death of its first and principal leader, Augustin Diamacoune Senghor. In general, the rebel leaders all seek to take over the MFDC, so that whenever one of them negotiates with the Senegalese government, the other party rejects the agreement reached (Ngom, 2020). Thus, the 1991 and 1992 agreements have since been followed by many others, which have only aggravated the fragmentation of the MFDC. This fragmentation, consciously or not maintained by Dakar, adds to the complexity of the situation. The MFDC factions adopt a defensive attitude, some choosing the path of negotiations, others preferring to maintain their warring enclaves. All in all, the very hard war phases of 1990-1991, 1992-1993, 1995 or 1997-1999 were followed by low intensity violence. The number of MFDC fighters was estimated by Martin (2004) Evans to be between 2000 and 4000. This figure should be treated with caution, however, as in recent years some fighters have laid down their arms as a result of peace negotiations between the Senegalese government and other parts of civil society, notably local associations.

2.3 Strategies and efforts to resolve the conflict in Casamance

Since the beginning of the conflict, the government of Senegal has sought to restore peace by signing several ceasefires and peace agreements with the separatist movement. The most recent peace agreement was signed on 30 December 2004 in Foudiougne between the then Senegalese Minister of the Interior Ousmane Ngom, representing the Senegalese government, and Augustin Diamacoune Senghor on behalf of the MFDC. These agreements certainly brought some stability and peace to the region, but never in a definitive way, as a few months later fighting resumed between the MFDC and the Senegalese army, resulting in a situation of 'neither war nor peace' in the region. It should also be noted that women have been heavily involved in the peace process in Casamance for several years. Indeed, *"as early as January 1993, the women's movement for peace in Casamance (MOFEPAC) was created around the feminist association yewwu yewwi"* (Foucher, 2007: 65). This commitment of the women was at the origin of the creation of the Platform of Women for Peace in Casamance (PFPC), whose main objective is to participate in the peace process in the region through various activities: organisation of peaceful marches, reflection and awareness-raising workshops, sharing days, forums, meetings with state authorities, etc. On the other hand, there is the Kabonkétoor association, which brings together the women of the sacred forest, who have also exerted a certain amount of influence on the combatants who have been entrenched in the forest for several years. It can therefore be seen that many actors are involved in the peace process in Casamance: Casamance leaders, the Catholic Church, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, political authorities from neighbouring countries, women's associations, etc.

Some authors even go so far as to say that there is a need for a more coherent approach to the peace process. Some authors even go so far as to say that recourse to tradition can be a very decisive element for solutions in Casamance (Foucher, 2007). Currently, the state of Senegal, which has always refused to involve the international community in the management of the conflict, has finally entrusted the peace initiative to international actors such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) and the Saint Egidio Community (Sène, 2018). However, the efforts made by these international mediators have come up against the refusal of certain chiefs, such as César Atoute Badiate, who demand to know the terms of the agreement between Senegal and these actors in order to participate in the negotiations. Beyond all these peace initiatives, it should be stressed that the resolution of the conflict in Casamance will inevitably require negotiations with all factions of the MFDC. This would enable a consensus to be reached between all the rebel leaders in order to establish a definitive peace in Casamance. An important parameter in the peace process in Casamance is the need for collaboration with neighbouring states, notably Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Guinea Conakry. Indeed, the analysis of the conflict in Casamance implies decentralising the gaze and considering the role of neighbouring countries, since a major question has been raised for several years: what are the routes through which the arms in the possession of the MFDC pass and transit? This observation highlights the relations between Senegal and neighbouring countries on security issues, particularly the role of Gambian territory in MFDC trafficking (Indian hemp, forest products and arms).

According to some analysts and observers of the Casamance conflict, Gambia serves as a refuge for a large number of MFDC fighters. The Gambia has been accused by the Senegalese authorities of hindering the peace process in Casamance, an accusation that the Gambian authorities have dismissed out of hand. This is a 'game of mutual accusations' between Senegal and the Gambia (Ébéré, 2015). The peace process in Casamance therefore requires a great deal of collaboration between the Senegalese and Gambian political authorities in order to remove any obstacles to stability in this region. Moreover, the difficulty of distinguishing between rebels and non-rebels among the population, especially among young men, makes any form of negotiation with the Senegalese state impossible, leaving open the following questions: who wants peace? who wants war for independence? This difficulty of identification thus adds to the many factors that prevent a definitive peace process in this region. In short, since the conflict broke out, the management of the crisis has seen a succession of actors with a hybrid profile with more or less mixed results. The murderous attacks orchestrated by alleged MFDC members in the villages of Diagonon in 2011 (eleven civilians killed) and Bofa in 2018 (fourteen civilians killed) reinforce the idea of a precarious lull and re-launch the status quo of an interminable conflict that alternates between furtive peace and sporadic war. This absence of a credible solution bears witness to the dramatic nature of the conflict, which can be seen in its many consequences, including the forced displacement of populations.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 The problem of population movements in Casamance

The situation of instability that reflects a "no war, no peace" situation has led to the displacement of thousands of people over the years, especially in rural areas. The populations fleeing this situation have found refuge in other villages commonly called "resettlement villages"; a place where they hope to be able to start a new life and continue their activities, mainly agricultural. Throughout Casamance there are resettlement villages scattered all over the country. For others, it is in the city that they hope to find refuge with a relative, friend or acquaintance, although it will be very difficult for them to start a new life since they have been forced to flee the area they have always known. As Jean Alain Goudiaby (2015) shows, this forced displacement follows two fundamental logics. The first logic, flight, refers to instinctive migration. It consists of leaving to save one's life and one's family, in a hurry, to neighbouring villages where there is still peace. This form of displacement takes place in a very restrictive context that strongly limits any possibility of choice. In other words, it is the result of a survival or neighbourhood opportunity for the families. Alongside these families, others, who follow a less instinctive logic, felt that it was necessary to take refuge next to the military, i.e. in the villages where military cantonments were set up and where they thought they would be safer. This is the case, for example, of the displaced people who settled in the Diabir neighbourhood not far from the EATA military base. The number of people and families who have been forced or coerced to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of the conflict is enormous. In 2010 alone, an assessment report on the situation of displaced persons in Casamance, carried out by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), estimates the total number of internally displaced persons in Casamance at between ten thousand (10000) and forty thousand (40000), although in the absence of an exhaustive assessment, the figures remain unreliable. The vast majority of IDPs have sought refuge with family, friends and host communities. In line with migration trends from rural to urban areas, many people have found refuge in Ziguinchor, the largest city in Casamance. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have taken refuge in the city is estimated to be between ten thousand (10000) and fourteen thousand (14000) (IDMC-NRC, 2010). These figures, while showing the state of displacement caused by the conflict, should be understood and taken with some caution as it is impossible to put an exact figure on the number of displaced people since the beginning of the hostilities between the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance and the Senegalese army. Many villages have been abandoned by the population as a result of armed exactions perpetrated by MFDC fighters and clashes between them and the Senegalese army. As Doudou Gueye (2018) reminds us, these population displacements are not solely attributable to the armed conflict. *"Armed violence is not the only cause of population displacement in Casamance; there are also social causes, such as lies, denunciations, slander, etc. Delations, lies and denunciations were factors that led to the displacement of those who were victims of them"* (Gueye, 2018: 204). Due to the presence of certain branches of the independence movement in the villages, the populations no longer have access to land to devote themselves fully to their agricultural activities, since the rebels have taken control of it, with the result that agriculture is losing its former lustre, with considerable repercussions on the daily lives of families. The armed conflict that has been going on in Casamance for more than three decades has had significant repercussions on the lives of local populations. It has caused the displacement of many people, particularly in the villages. Indeed, the occupation and seizure of land by the separatist movement in the depths of the Casamance forest has forced people to flee their villages and abandon the fields that allowed them to survive.

3.2 The situation of displaced persons: between precariousness and adaptation in a host environment

On leaving their respective villages, displaced families rushed to more secure areas to live with relatives or to find livelihoods and improve their living conditions. In doing so, they became strangers in the villages or towns where they settled after leaving their home areas without land or economic resources. In most cases, this uprooting has contributed to the social and economic vulnerability of these populations. This forced mobility has further increased the demographic pressure on the regional capital and the impoverishment of the population, with many of the displaced in the city no longer having access to their land and not having found work (Robin, 2006). This demographic pressure on the host area has led to increased competition for space and natural resources such as land, water and facilities. In this form of competition, which has a lasting effect on life strategies, displaced persons find it difficult to establish themselves in the host environment, where there are gaps in terms of access to resources, as many can only rely on those made available by the host family. It is well known that the deteriorating living conditions of the populations hosting the displaced, as evidenced by the inadequacy of basic social services, the lack of economic infrastructure and the degradation of natural resources, keep these populations in a situation of social and economic insecurity.

In addition, the demographic pressure exerted on towns such as Ziguinchor has contributed to an increase in impoverishment, which has affected many displaced people who used to make a living from farming in their home village and who have been faced with the problem of access to land in their new environment. For those who settle in the city, these problems are accompanied by difficulties in adapting to the urban environment, where the social characteristics differ from the way of life in the rural world, which is a privileged place for family and community solidarity. In the host territories, the cultivable space already occupied by the local population was often inaccessible to the displaced. Thus, many displaced people who had no more land to cultivate felt discriminated against because they perceived this as a lack of support from the local population and political authorities. The displaced are also faced with the difficulty of finding paid work due to the lack of businesses that provide employment. Moreover, the lack of qualifications limits the possibilities of access to employment in a context where qualifications are an important factor of employability. This situation has forced some households to invest in market gardening, small-scale trade and poultry farming. However, the weakness of production due to the lack of funds and equipment and the lack of technical know-how (poultry or market gardening) does not allow them to compete on the market.

This is despite the help of international agencies and NGOs involved in assisting the displaced. As a result, the displaced are exposed to unemployment and impoverishment despite the remobilisation of family ties and the activation of family solidarity. Following Jean Alain Goudiaby (2015), this observation leads us to say that displacement has had a negative impact on the economic situation of the population because the living conditions of the displaced have deteriorated overall. It should also be pointed out that displacement has led to the dislocation of certain families who have been forced to separate due to the lack of residential space with certain host families. We can cite the example of Birima (16 years old) who was forced to separate from his family to be accommodated with a host family in Lyndiane, while part of his family, to whom he was very attached, lived in Goudomp. Knowing the importance of the family as a protective space, it is easy to understand the psychosocial impact of such a separation which, in addition to having affected his socio-affective experience, determined his perception of the Casamance conflict. This delicate experience of the displaced situation, due to the separation from the attachment figure, can also be read in Fadèl's testimony:

"When I left my family and moved to a host family here in Ziguinchor, I felt a big break. I was constantly afraid because my relatives were far away from me and we didn't have a telephone to check on them. I had a difficult youth because of this separation".

However, the findings of the literature and field observations lead us to recognise that, despite their foreign status, some displaced persons have been able to follow paths to integration that have enabled them to maintain a decent standard of living. According to Doudou Gueye (2015), this category of displaced persons corresponds to those who have been able to rise economically and emerge from the desolation thanks to the experiences they had acquired before their displacement. For him, *"with the experience they had acquired before their displacement, they found favourable conditions in the host country that enabled them to enter into a commercial logic with employers, or at least to monetise their skills and know-how"* (Gueye, 2015: 209). Others have been able to benefit from the assistance offered by international partners and NGOs to engage in income-generating activities that have been beneficial in improving their living conditions and those of their households. This is the case of Doudou, a mine victim who left the insecurity that prevailed in his village (Niassy) to settle in Bignona where he runs a shop financed by an NGO.

3.3 The desire of some displaced persons not to return: what are the motivating factors ?

The current lull in violence in Casamance has strengthened the desire of some refugees to return to their villages. This desire is expressed by some of the displaced. And thanks to the involvement of state and non-governmental actors, return programmes have been implemented for several years. Awareness-raising campaigns on the challenges of return have been developed, as well as concrete actions relating to the reconstruction of villages (development of housing and roads). Similarly, economic reintegration initiatives, reforestation campaigns and talks have been organised to promote social cohesion and good management of natural resources. These initiatives have been reinforced by a kind of community mobilisation that has led to a large proportion of the displaced population supporting the idea of returning. However, this option is far from being validated by all the displaced, insofar as many of them are reluctant to return to their villages. Four categories of displaced persons cite economic, social and sometimes psychological arguments to justify their desire to remain in the host country. The first category identified develops arguments that relate to the very reason for the displacement, namely the question of security. Some of the displaced fear a resumption of hostilities between the army and the MFDC because the idea of a definitive peace is not yet anchored in their minds. The threat of mines and other explosive remnants of war contributes to maintaining the fear of permanent insecurity and to annihilating the desire to return to their villages.

Other IDPs cite socio-economic motivations for their decision to stay in the host country. Two categories of displaced persons are involved in these economic considerations. On the one hand, these are displaced persons whose means of subsistence (land and livestock) and infrastructure left in the village have been ransacked by armed gangs or taken over by non-displaced villagers or by MFDC fighters, and on the other hand, those who have taken up the challenge of economic integration in the host environment. The latter category includes people who have already taken the route of return in the hope of economic reintegration and who have found it impossible to exploit the property they left behind because it has been either looted or taken over. Indeed, the presence of certain factions of the independence movement in the villages means that the populations no longer have access to arable land to devote themselves fully to their agricultural activities since the rebels have taken control of it. Such a situation suggests probable conflicts or even reprisals in the event of a desire to take back the occupied property and annihilates any desire for a new return. The other category includes individuals who prefer to stay in the host community because they have been able to take advantage of the employment opportunities that have arisen in that community. One example is Dialika, who left the village of Saint-Louis Mancagne to settle permanently in the Tilène district of Ziguinchor:

"I left my village in 1998 to settle in Ziguinchor. Here I learned sewing in a workshop located in the perimeter of the church of Tilène. Afterwards, I started to work for myself as a seamstress. In my workshop, I work with three employees and an apprentice. I live well from this activity because it allows me to take care of myself and to help my relatives. I don't plan to go back because I'm not going to leave everything I have here and go back to the unknown".

The analysis of this discourse shows that, like many of the displaced people we met, Dialika considers return to be a risky adventure that she does not intend to embark on. This is partly because she has succeeded in integrating herself economically into the host community, and partly because, in her view, return is a risky or even perilous venture. Finally, another category of displaced persons relies on particularly psychological motivations to justify their desire not to return. The heads of household we met were afraid of subjecting their families to a new psychological shock that a new break with their environment could bring. This argument is more common among households whose children or some of their children were born and raised in the host area and who seem to have developed a sense of attachment to this environment. They are also displaced people who have managed to integrate socially in the host environment. This form of integration can be seen in their access to housing, basic social services and their involvement in decision-making processes in the host community. This raises the question of identity among this category of displaced persons who, while others consider them to be foreigners, now see themselves as an integral part of the host population thanks to their attachment to the host environment.

Conclusion

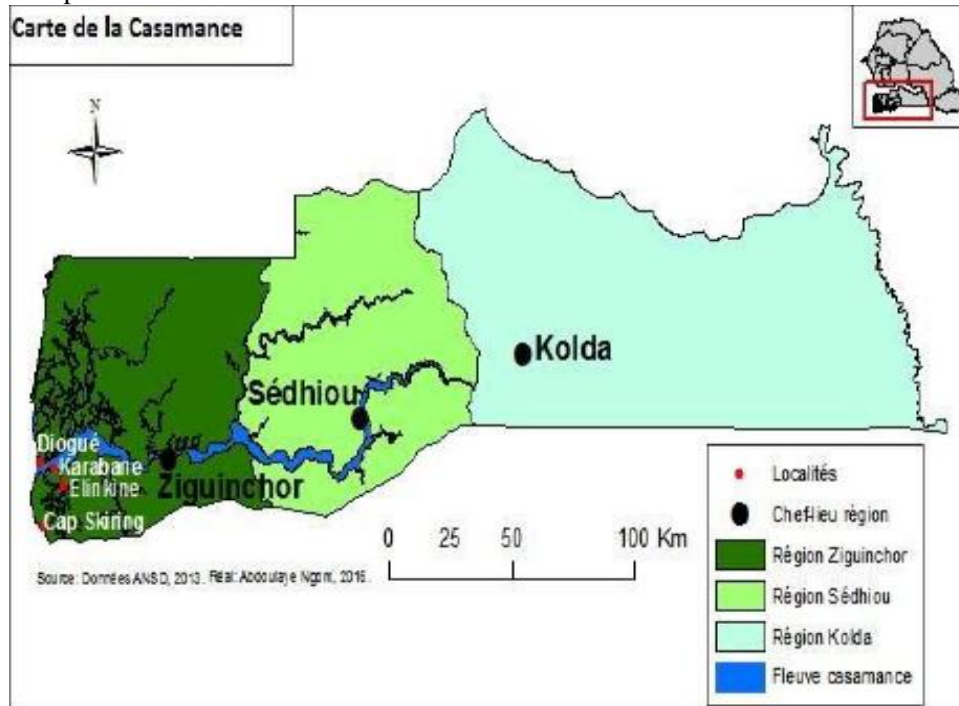
The massive displacement of populations to escape insecurity and clashes in certain villages of Casamance has led to a rather delicate humanitarian problem. In addition to the difficulties of social integration, the lack of cultivable land has kept the displaced in a situation of unprecedented social and economic insecurity. However, the lull that has prevailed for several years has given rise to a desire to return among some of the displaced, while others, unable to start a profitable activity in the host communities, have already returned to their villages. The problem is that once they have returned, these populations are forced to restart their activities with new means, as many infrastructures were destroyed during the clashes.

Not only do they have to find new means of subsistence, but they also have to face the uncertainty of a possible resumption of clashes or conflicts linked to the covetousness of goods and cultivable areas already monopolised by others. Such risks are cited by a large proportion of the displaced to justify their desire not to return, not to mention the fact that some of them have managed to integrate economically into their host environment and that others want to avoid the psychological upheaval that a new displacement could cause their families.

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Figure 1: Map of Casamance



Source : Ngom Abdoulaye, 2017