



Photo: Christian Chatelain



Kawawana

Community mobilisation for the environment brings the good life back to the village in Senegal

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Kawawana means “*Our heritage to be preserved together*”. It is the fruit of the efforts of a few local fishermen from the Diola people of Lower Casamance. They united in an association, self-mobilising the communities of their eight villages and bringing together nearly 12,000 people, without any external financial support, and established the reconstruction of a territory of life that had been deteriorating.

The president of these fisherman became especially concerned about restoring better food, social, and environmental conditions for the population. Learning about the possibility of declaring a community conserved area on part of the municipality's territory, he used his network of fishermen and approached each of the families concerned. The purpose was to help mobilise all possible volunteers around the re-establishment of local, ancestral fishing rules for

the well-being and restoration of their ecosystems. This ecological restoration resulted in the recovery of the food chain, with several species of fish and their predators reappearing.

Kawawana is also an emblematic example of the restoration of the “good life in the village” through solidarity as well as the reactivation and revaluation of traditional rules and practices of natural resource use that are strongly rooted in the local culture. Kawawana also has the great distinction of having been the first territory of life officially recognised as an ICCA (APAC in French) by the government in 2010, paving the way for other communities to declare other territories of life.

Kawawana is located in Blouf, in the southern part of Senegal. It covers 9,665 hectares, representing 30 per cent of the area of the commune of Mangagoulack. Its



9,665 hectares



Custodians: Community of Mangagoulack, 12,000 members

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Translated from French by George Smith

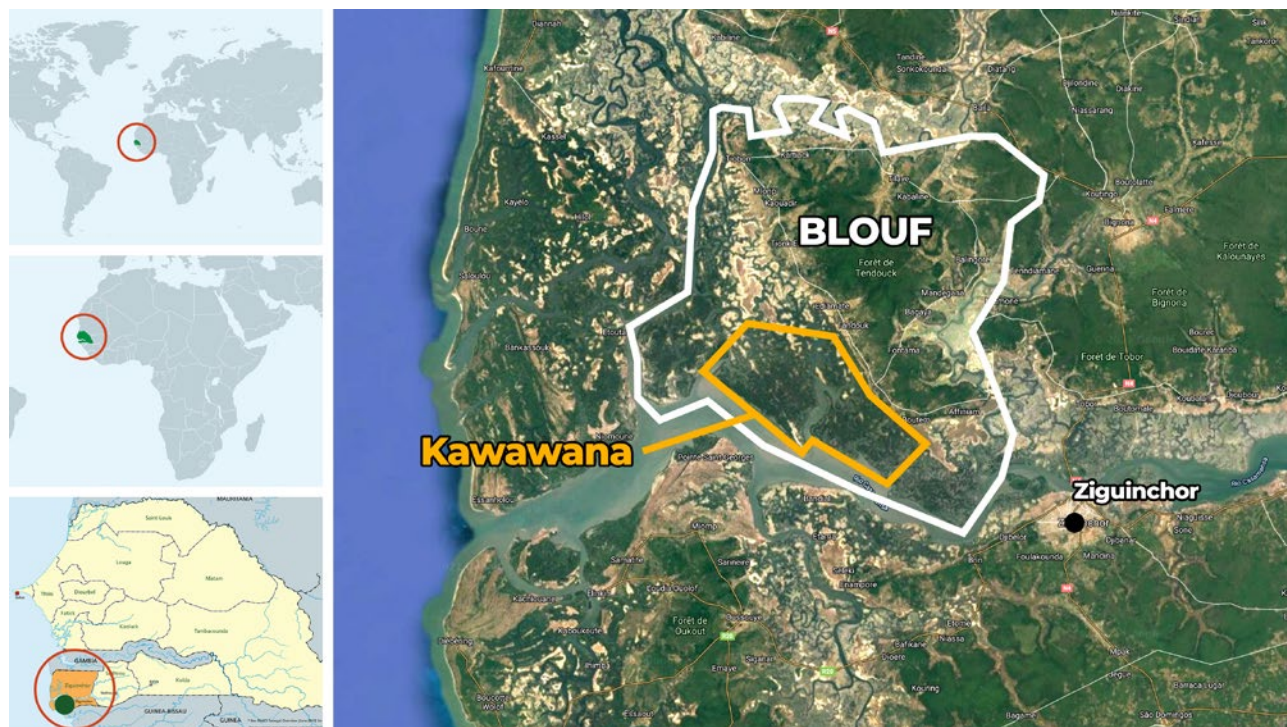


Photo: Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend

“Since Kawawana was born, the people have found themselves in very good health. We have seen that the fishermen live again, thanks to Kawawana. And when the fishermen live, we live!”

Mr. Idrissa Goudiaby, villager of Tendouck





Kawawana in Senegal and in the world. Map: Ines Hirata

main ecosystem is Soudano-Guinean and it is made up of estuarine mangroves interspersed with canals (Bolong). The main ecological functions maintained by Kawawana are those of protection (of soils against erosion and salinisation, of species against habitat loss through deforestation, of biological equilibrium against invasive plants) and regeneration (spawning grounds and nursery) of fish in safety from predators.

Links with the territory based on traditions that are still intact despite globalisation and modernism

Historically, each Diola village had its own *bolong* and sacred wood with its own functions and prohibitions. Today, there are still sacred links between the living environment and subsistence activities such as agriculture, hunting, fishing, craftwork, and so forth. The Diola people are known for maintaining strong social cohesion and cultural values that are still very much alive, and the guardian community of Kawawana remains rooted in these traditions, which have strongly resisted the more problematic aspects of development and globalisation. Even today, it still relies on local resources for an economy based on barter (growing rice for food, fishing, arboriculture, gathering, hunting, handicrafts, etc.) as well as close and sacred links

with its living environment (sacred woods, prayer sites, forbidden forests, forbidden *bolongs*, etc.). The community of Kawawana has reinstated customary rules and know-how for the use and conservation of its resources by becoming deeply aware of its dependence on this territory for its survival. The community has a very strong sense of identity with its territory and is very proud of its culture, which it sees as a source of wealth rather than a hindrance to its development.

The majority of the population of Kawawana is made up of young people. Although almost all attend school in the formal education system, the youth are still very attached to their culture and its symbols such as the sacred woods and various rites of passage into adulthood, which provide the spaces and moments for the transmission of knowledge between generations. Emigration affects this part of Senegal, but the presence of Kawawana limits this rural exodus and helps young people stay in the village. While knowledge of the geography and biodiversity of the area is known to all Diolas (even the youngest), more esoteric or mystical knowledge is held and preserved by the initiated. These are particularly the wise men but also the women of the community who are, for example, the only ones who are empowered and able to put in place (necessarily at night) the fetishes required for the application of the traditional rules defined by the whole community.



The Diola community of Kawawana depends on two forests: 1) mangroves, rich in fish and oysters, and 2) terrestrial, rich in timber and non-timber forest products. Both are now part of the Kawawana ICCA and provide many environmental services to the population. Photo: Christian Chatelain

The biological effects of conservation in Kawawana extend far beyond the boundaries of the ICCA and benefit the entire region economically and socially. Photo: Christian Chatelain



The Mangagoulack terrestrial forest (more than 5000 ha), saved from charcoal production by the mobilisation of the population, is now part of the Kawawana ICCA. Photo: Christian Chatelain

Tough local regulation is better accepted and enforced than national regulation

One of the main achievements of the fishermen of the Rural Community of Mangagoulack, grouped in an association called APCRM,² was not to create a new institution with new rules, but to rehabilitate, revitalise and strengthen their local customary institutions and old rules by adapting them to the demands of today's world.

The institution of Kawawana is based on traditional systems of community and local management of mangrove resources and is made up of various bodies, including a General Assembly, a Community Council, a Bureau, a Council of Elders and a Scientific Council, and each of the eight villages concerned is represented in it. It has been recognised by the Senegalese government since 2010 and holds collective rights of access, conservation and regulation. In spite of modern legislation with unclear land law, this customary institution is highly effective in regulation because it is better adapted to the context, better understood by the population, and more effective than modern national regulations, which are poorly applied for various reasons.

Kawawana's governance institutions are empowered to enforce their regulations. Twenty-four of their representatives participated in government training to become qualified as monitoring officers to record infractions, arrest offenders, and present them to the

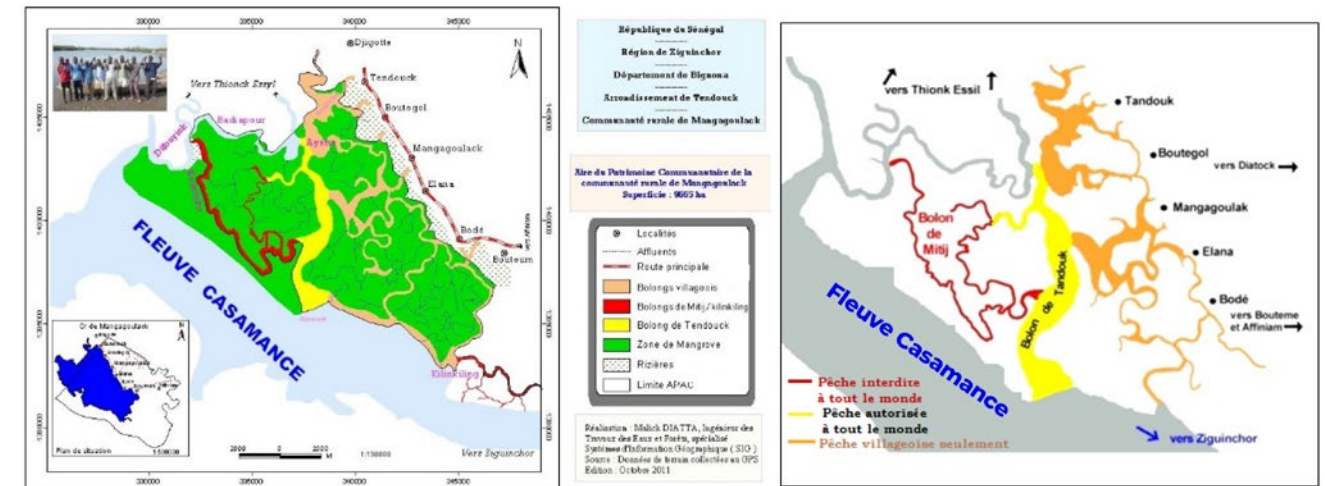
relevant state services (fisheries or forestry). These 24 volunteer monitoring officers of Kawawana thus ensure, on behalf of their community and in service of the decentralised state, a policing of locally established rules which are much more rigorous and effective than what happens outside of Kawawana.

The governing institutions of Kawawana have drawn up a management plan consisting of three internal zones to manage the mangroves in their territory of life. A first zone is off limits to everyone, protecting a reproductive site for fish populations and a home to the ancestors and the spirits of conservation. A second area is reserved for village fishing; the products of this fishery having to be either consumed or sold locally by local intermediaries in order to satisfy local demand at a price accessible to the greatest number of community members. A third fishing zone is authorised to everyone but prohibits the use of nets that are not permitted by national legislation. The fish and fish products from this zone can be sold freely on all markets in the region.

These rules are displayed both in modern and traditional ways (signposts and fetishes), and widely explained, particularly via radio (the 12,000 people in the community know what Kawawana is and are able to describe it). Kawawana has its own team of monitors (who, in addition to their voluntary work, take the time to fish and sell their fish in order to finance the fuel

Decisions are taken by consensus between all members of the community in regular general assemblies.

Photo Christian Chatelain



The Kawawana territory of life with the three conservation zones. Map: APCRM

for the surveillance canoes), as well as a monitoring system (ichthyological monitoring and socio-economic monitoring) measuring the impact of the rules applied both on local biodiversity and on the community's quality of life.

Official recognition of Kawawana by the Senegalese state in 2010 has strengthened the bonds of trust between the population and state services, allowing other conservation actions to be taken such as

the preservation of another part of the forest in Mangagoulack that is being threatened by a carbonisation project for commercial purposes. This recognition has, above all, set a precedent for many other communities in Senegal and beyond, who can also feel more confident in asserting their right to govern their own territories of life.

Biodiversity spectacularly regenerated and a community profoundly revitalised

Kawawana has succeeded in increasing the biodiversity of the environment, both in quantity and quality, with the reappearance of about twenty species of fish, of which only the oldest was previously known, the return of the manatee and many migratory birds, as well as the return of predators such as the dolphin and the crocodile – proof of the increase in available biomass.

Kawawana has also managed to improve people's daily lives. There is more fish at a higher quality and a better price because it is produced, fished and sold locally. Also, the sale of fish has generated more income and less debt for the fishermen, with the creation of jobs for local marketing, starting a virtuous circle for the entire local economy.

Building on its successes, Kawawana is one of the emblematic examples of community conservation in



“I fished with thiasses (monofilament nets). When Kawawana banned them, I didn't really agree with them but I left them aside anyway. Now I think it's good.”

Mr Baboucar Goudiaby, fisherman

² L'association des pêcheurs de la communauté de Mangagoulack (APCRM) – The fishermen's association of the community of Mangagoulack, which now has over 420 members.



“Thanks to Kawawana, there is great cohesion in the community, from Tchioko to Affiniam, and Kawawana is recognised throughout Senegal.”

Mr Idrissa Goudiaby, villager of Tendouck



The fishes are back!
Photo: Christian Chatelain

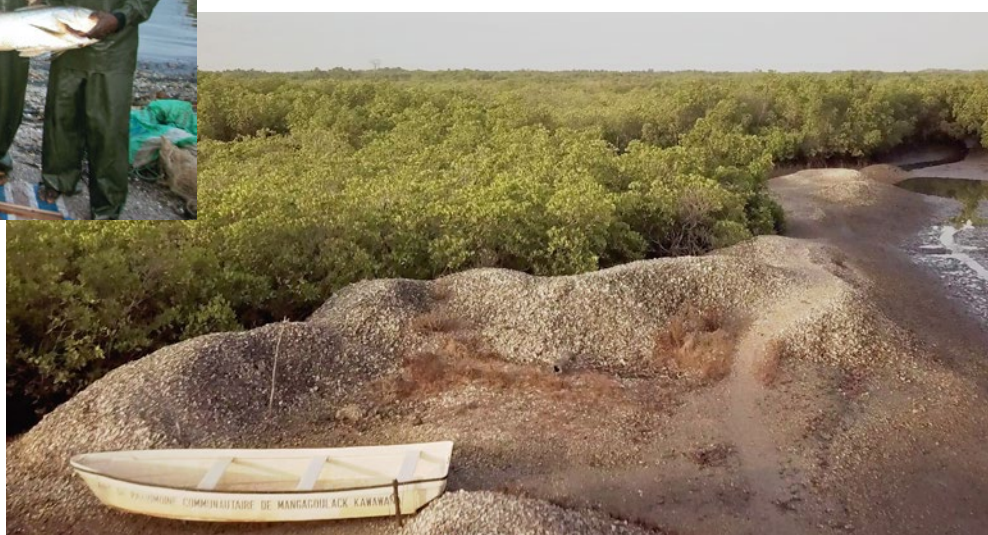
Senegal. Ten years after its legal recognition by the state and the implementation of its innovative community governance structure, it remains a model that is shaking up the principles of mainstream conservation in the country and in West Africa more broadly.

Kawawana is significant at different geographic levels: at the local level for its governing community, which needs it to “live well”; at the regional level in Casamance because the regeneration of fish species in the territory of life has a spill-over effect on other neighbouring territories and brings economic benefits; and at the national level because the preservation of ecosystems in Casamance has an impact on the entire economy of the country.

Administratively, laws and policies relating to protected areas must integrate community governance as a type of governance in its own right, similar to the required integration of state governance. On the political level, this example of governance by the community of Mangagoulack has helped to open up the field of possibilities for Senegalese civil society as a whole.

Casamance, considered the “breadbasket” of Senegal, is a privileged region in terms of its geography (access to coastal resources), climate (rainfall and temperature) and soils (presence of organic matter). However, it remains essentially a rural region where per capita income is lower than the national average. Three decades of armed conflict in Casamance have resulted in persistent economic poverty. In this context, and in the face of pressure from many migrants in search of resources (especially fish), the community of Mangagoulack is

The Kawawana surveillance boat allows the control of the three river entry points of the ICCA-territory of life. Photo: Christian Chatelain



Despite external pressures and threats, the Mangagoulack community continues its traditional practices, such as post-harvest grazing in rice fields. Photo: Christian Chatelain

doing well, seeking to guarantee its members privileged access to resources at an acceptable price, thanks to its territory of life. For example, fish caught in zone N°2 of Kawawana (village fishing zone) must be consumed or sold only in the village, not in the town, where selling prices are more attractive.

Following the observation of the increasing scarcity of fish products – the basis of Diola food – in their meals, and the visible deterioration of their health, the fishermen of Mangagoulack wanted first to rediscover “good fish” on their plates. Their whole struggle for conservation has had this basic nurturing principle as its foundation and justification, taking the conservation of ecosystems not as an end in itself but as a means of restoring a healthy environment favourable to their various needs for life (food, timber, pharmacopoeia, gathering for resale, etc.) and capable of responding to various external pressures (soil erosion, salinisation of land, exceptional tides, droughts, etc.).

These various pressures are now being exacerbated by climate change, which is having visible effects in the region, such as an overall drop in rainfall, degradation of mangroves in some areas, and salinisation of rice fields by the rising saltwater, posing a serious threat to rice cultivation.

Drawing on their experience in managing difficult periods (such as the great droughts of the 1970s), and led by the conservation efforts of the fishermen, the Mangagoulack community has managed to mitigate these negative effects by preserving a mangrove that is less disturbed and thus better able to play its role in protecting and maintaining land and sensitive ecosystems. The regeneration of the mangrove and the return of a number of predators such as dolphins, to the point of provoking complaints from some fishermen who have seen their nets damaged by them, are indisputable proof of this.

Kawawana faces new threats

The results of the decisions and management measures taken by the Mangagoulack community are very positive, but the governing institutions of Kawawana



must remain cautious and vigilant as various threats remain, especially to the fish and mangrove wood which are sought after throughout the region.

A first risk is becoming a victim of one's own success. The success of Kawawana has attracted a growing number of fishermen and the effort to control the fishing has had to be managed first and foremost by the fishermen themselves. Young people and returning migrants, all of whom wanted to fish in Kawawana, were encouraged to move into other sectors.

A second risk is the waning enthusiasm for volunteering. So far, the whole community has made a huge effort for Kawawana – an effort principally based on volunteering. The supervisors, follow-up surveyors, fishermen leaders, and all the people involved in Kawawana's success are involved without remuneration and often even out of their own pockets. Initial solutions have been found to ensure that at least monitoring and sanctions are maintained (for example, collective fisheries are organised to finance some monitoring expenses).

A third risk is dependence on external aid. The support of NGOs and their “projects” is often accompanied by influence – and Kawawana has never wanted this. On the contrary, the community has always asserted its independence and decision-making according to its own means and by carefully choosing which well-targeted support might be accepted.

Finally, the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources – water, forests, or even the subsoil – in and around Kawawana remains a threat. A planned wood charcoal project, which the community unanimously rejected, underlines this threat, even in Mangagoulack

The harvesting of oysters is only allowed from 1 March to 31 May. Traditionally, this activity is carried out by women. Photo Christian Chatelain



A canoe full of oysters.
Photo Christian Chatelain

itself. Indeed, strengthened by their success with Kawawana, the fishing leaders, supported by the village elders, managed to resist the wishes of certain administrative officials of the municipality who were planning to cut down and transform a large part of Kawawana's neighbouring forest into charcoal for commercial purposes. In addition, oil and mining projects are also currently being developed in Senegal. These include a project to extract zirconia in Niafrang on the Casamance coast and a few kilometres from Kawawana, which has already been signed off by the state, and against which several communities are currently mobilising.

Another issue, less visible yet equally threatening, is that of access to land and sustainable resource management, especially for women – an issue which Kawawana officials are currently addressing. While the country's constitution enshrines natural resources as national heritage, each village considers the land and water resources of its territory as the property of the village's citizens. Kawawana is responding to this problem by supporting women's activities such as the gathering of oysters – a key activity with potential impact on coastal-marine ecosystems. By strongly involving women in Kawawana, local leaders

are reducing the threat to the environment that the development of unsustainable oyster harvesting could pose to the area.

Building on its success, Kawawana is the leading example and cornerstone of a comprehensive network of territories of life throughout West Africa

The experience of Kawawana, an important first in Casamance and a model of sustainable community governance and management for all of Senegal, has opened up new perspectives for more inclusive, participatory, equitable and effective conservation in the coastal marine environments across West Africa. Its overall objective of eliminating open access to village fishing areas demonstrates that local and community-led resource management, derived from traditional customary practices can help restore environmental and social benefits for all connected with this ecosystem, including non-local people.

History and culture in Casamance show that local communities maintain a local identity and strong internal bonds of solidarity – ideal for cooperative work that is meant to bring social benefits. At a crucial

moment in their conservation approach, Kawawana were able to benefit from technical support to accompany them in their struggle to safeguard their biological and cultural values, and today they feel capable of contributing to convincing the central authorities of the merits of natural resource stewardship by and for local communities.

This 10-year experience of returning to customary community conservation in Kawawana in Mangagoulack, Senegal, is a success story with many interrelated factors and examples of the improvements of biodiversity and the living conditions: a return of fish in quantity (doubling of the number and average size) and quality (reappearance of 20 fish species) in this specific territory of life, which also includes positive effects in neighbouring fishing areas; a return of a village diet richer in protein (fish and shellfish); a decrease in unregulated cutting of mangroves and an overall increase in plant and animal diversity and abundance (timber, birds, reptiles, etc.); a decrease in family debts contracted with shopkeepers and return to the village of migrants who had left in exodus; and a strengthening of community cohesion and individual involvement in the conservation of the collective good.

The governance institution that has enabled all these improvements for the community in Kawawana is now managing the consequences of its success and is currently resisting outside pressure, which is becoming stronger as the results of its conservation successes become more evident.

Rewarded for its efforts by several international awards and forms of recognition, including the Equator Prize in 2012 and registration in the World Conservation Monitoring Centre's international ICCA Registry in 2012, the community of Kawawana hopes to continue their initiative, expand its area and improve their management capacities and operations. Indeed, the legal recognition of Kawawana as a protected area governed by the community of Mangagoulack, officially expressed by the Senegalese state in 2010, is a major factor in protecting against the increasing external pressures of resource exploitation. But it is only through developing a powerful network of ICCAs—territories of life in Senegal and beyond that communities can hope to represent a significant force for the long-term conservation of West Africa's rich biological and cultural heritage.



Photo: Christian Chatelain



About this report

This chapter is part of the Territories of Life: 2021 Report, composed of local, national, regional and global analyses of territories and areas conserved by Indigenous peoples and local communities (sometimes abbreviated as “ICCAs” or “territories of life”). The report is part of an ongoing process to develop the knowledge base on territories of life in support of Indigenous peoples’ and local communities’ self-determined priorities. It is produced by the **ICCA Consortium with the support of several partners**.

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About the ICCA Consortium

The ICCA Consortium is a global non-profit association dedicated to supporting Indigenous peoples and local communities who are governing and conserving their collective lands, waters and territories. Its organisational Members and individual Honorary members in more than 80 countries are undertaking collective actions at the local, national, regional and international levels across several thematic streams, including documenting, sustaining and defending territories of life, as well as youth and intergenerational relations.

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