

When the Water Comes

On the northern coast of Senegal, the fishing village of Saint Louis has been in a losing battle with the ocean. Homes lining the shore have been decimated; mosques and schools lay in ruins as the crashing waves pull sand away, leading to foundations eroding, caved-in floors, crumbling walls and even the cemetery has begun to flood. Currently, hundreds of families have been forced to evacuate due to erosion. Most have been resettled by the authorities to a tented site, known as Khar Yalla camp, further inland. The camp has a few outdoor showers and latrines, but lacks proper access to running water and unfortunately floods often.

Ten miles south of Saint-Louis in an area with 80,000 residents, Doun Baba Dièye was completely submerged in 2009, just a few years after the authorities in Senegal abruptly dug a channel through the small peninsula that initially protected its inhabitants. The residents became casualties of the ruinous attempt to reduce flood risks by re-routing the Senegal River. This man-made breach expanded quickly; accelerating erosion to areas that had previously been shielded, forcing the evacuation of its populace further inland.

Few know what they will do as the water continues to rise, with estimates that within 50 years the entire area will be uninhabitable.