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## Making Cities Resilient: My City is Getting Ready!

World Disaster Reduction Campaign 2010-2011

## Saint Louis is getting ready!

### Saint Louis, Senegal



Population: 200,000

*Type of Hazard: Floods and Drought*

The City of Saint-Louis, Senegal, founded in 1659, is an archipelago of 4600 hectares, with a population of about 200,000 inhabitants living in a very scattered surface area. Located near the mouth of the Senegal River in northwest Senegal, where it shares a border with the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Saint-Louis is 270 km

from the capital city, Dakar and is on the prestigious list of the World Human Heritage since December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2000.

Saint Louis is surrounded by low-lying floodplains and marshes while also sitting on the edge of the Sahel. As a result, the city is plagued by periods of drought throughout much of the year and by flooding during the rainy season when the river overflows. Risks are likely to be further exacerbated by climate change, both from a rise in sea level and increased water flows in the river.

Heavy rains in 1998 and 2000 flooded almost all of the city's districts. Thousands of people were seriously affected, suffering from diseases linked to unsanitary conditions. Recurrent flooding every year due to heavy rain fall also triggers a slow-down in the economy and in educational activities as floodwaters invade houses as well as schools constraining people's movements.

In 2008, UN-Habitat designated Saint-Louis as the city most threatened by rising sea levels in the whole of Africa, citing climate change and a failed 2004 river and tidal canal project as the cause.

All stakeholders should be actually part of the implementation of the strategies adapted to address the issue. Saint-Louis population has been at the frontline and responded to the call of the municipality. Government authorities and the international community need to

be more involved, as it is a common responsibility to address a threat to the future of Saint-Louis and to human heritage in general.

### **Disaster Risk Reduction activities**

Some areas of Saint Louis should not have been settled because of the risk of flooding combined with inadequate or no drainage networks. Given that there is not much land left in the municipality for building, flood-prone areas pose enormous problems for residents and the authorities responsible for urban management. To improve the situation, regional services have focused their attention on awareness-raising campaigns and building capacity among all stakeholders and decision-makers to help prepare the city's inhabitants for future flooding. The government together with NGOs, regularly maps existing and potential flood zones, particularly analysing remote sensing data in the Senegal River delta. This information is shared with the local population. Additionally schoolchildren, teachers and the community are trained in risk management.

*“Poverty and vulnerability are not a fatality. People are not irreversibly condemned; people just do not mobilize the internal and external resources available to address the issues they face. Our predecessors fought to leave us with a heritage and it is our responsibility to preserve and promote it for the next generation”*

*Cheikh Mamadou Abiboulay Dieye, Mayor of Saint Louis*

