



A Taste of Senegal with a Flavour of Teranga

Community Report by Isobel Garvie (Senegal volunteer 2023-24)

Thinking about the topic for this community report has taken me so long and in so many directions. I've just returned from the most incredible, life-changing experience which I will never forget and which I will try to sum up in the next few pages. A highlight of my year was the people. A cliché, I know, but true. The people made our community and they truly opened their families to us, especially when cooking. I found that cooking brought us together in a way different from any other. In Senegal, it's only the women who cook, clean and wash dishes which meant that any help we offered was graciously accepted. We struggled the whole year with the gender inequality and in the end the result of it has made me see women in a new light, with a whole new level of respect. The famous Senegalese "Teranga" (*hospitality*) allowed us to have the opportunity to cook with many different women all over the country. Whenever we visited a family, we'd be roped into helping and the women were always eager for us "toubabs" (*white people*) to learn some Senegalese dishes. We not only cooked with our host families but also with people we taught, other volunteers' host families and teachers. We found it was an amazing way to truly be immersed in the culture and learn the ways of a Senegalese family. In this community report, I hope to explain a little about the Senegalese culture, the importance of food and drink and the general generosity of Senegalese people.

Thieboudienne



Meal: Lunch

Prep Time: 3hours

Prepared by: Women

Level of tastiness: 10/10

Of course, I have to start with the national dish of Senegal: Thieboudienne. “Thieb” meaning rice and “dienne” meaning fish. We would eat this meal maybe 3 or 4 times a week for lunch and it was without fail my favourite dish. The preparation of any lunch dish would take around 3 hours and would commence in the morning with a trip to the market. Here is the story of our first time making Thieboudienne.

Middle of December and we finally plucked up the courage to ask our friend’s family if they could teach us to make Thieboudienne. They were of course delighted and so told us to come round at 10am so as we could go to the market. Our first proper trip to the fish market where we learnt how to buy fish and all the various vegetables too. Who knew so many ingredients were needed?! By this point we had realised we would be cooking with one of the women who only speaks Wolof, the native language we were yet to learn much of... However, we had an English-speaking male friend who would occasionally pop his head in when a translation was needed and who managed to photograph the whole thing! The whole family were intrigued in watching the toubabs cook their beloved dish and therefore there were a lot of laughs and chatter filling the kitchen. We cooked half outside, half inside crouched over the gas stove watching the vegetables boil away. At the end, we were congratulated for our meal even though we had followed our friend’s instructions to a T and therefore hadn’t contributed much! However, this sense of eagerness and kindness to ensure we understood everything and felt valued added to the amazing day we had. One thing that always stands out to me is when our friend was busy at the stove she realised that she hadn’t told us what she was doing. “Ah demma fatay!” (*Ah I forgot!*) she exclaimed whilst face-palming. She rushed us over to the stove and tried her best (in Wolof!) to teach us what she was doing. She was so keen on ensuring we knew every step even though we had no common language and this was something special.

This first time properly cooking a meal sparked my love for Senegalese cooking and also my admiration for Senegalese women. After we had finished cooking, it was straight onto washing the dishes in a bucket of cold, soapy water – no rest ever for Senegalese women! And yet, every woman we met was always patient, welcoming and many acted like a Senegalese mother to us. They are true superheros and forever an inspiration.

Attaya

Meal: Drink, usually in afternoon **Prep Time:** 1hour

Prepared by: Men **Level of tastiness:** 9/10

Now to the men's side of the story: Attaya. This is a sweet but strong Senegalese tea which is cooked every day without fail and normally a few times a day. This tea was the men's job as it involves not much work and the men are able to sit around with their friends chatting. Our good friend, an English teacher, taught us the hints and tricks for it which gave us an insight into a Senegalese man's life. The whole process takes around one hour if you make two "rounds" of tea, as they are known. Basically just everyone gets to have two glasses of tea.

The tea is prepared over a gas stove or charcoal, using a small teapot and Attaya glasses (essentially shot glasses!) The key to getting a good taste is the amount of sugar you put in and the mint that you add. However, I would say the most important thing about Attaya full stop is the foam that "makes it beautiful", as I was once told when I asked what the point of it is. This "mouss" (*foam*) took us ages to perfect and I'm still not sure we're very good at it! Attaya is an art and takes a long time to prepare, however, it is in no way back-breaking or tiring to make. It was usually the man's job (their only "household" job) to prepare the tea after lunch, however, sometimes, the women even had to do this as well. When walking through the streets, you would see many men sitting under trees or at the side of their houses with their male friends waiting for the Attaya to boil. You would rarely see women with their friends, and even more rarely, see women without some veg prep or a broom in their hands. Attaya quickly became a favourite drink of ours and a way for us to spend spare afternoons, but we were lucky not to have a meal to prepare and therefore have the time to spend making Attaya with our male friends. Drinking Attaya is a key part of Senegalese culture – if you refused a glass that would be considered rude or they would think you were ill. The tea was always shared with whoever was in the group and you were only allowed to drink three cups at a time. I've taken 12 packets of Attaya home with me and am looking forward to sharing it with family and friends here in Scotland!



Ingredients

Attaya leaves

Mint

Sugar

Instructions

1. Boil water with Attaya tea leaves in teapot and cook until leaves turn dark
2. Add sugar and mint and pour from teapot to glass and back and forth until sugar/mint is mixed
3. Cook on gas/charcoal for a bit longer to keep tea warm
4. Fill one glass of tea and start the process for making "mouss"
5. To make the "mouss", pour the Attaya from one glass to the next and back and forth until you have a few cm of foam
6. Pour Attaya into both glasses to fill them and then serve!

Petit Pois

Meal: Breakfast/Dinner

Prepared by: Women

Prep Time: A long time depending on the peas!

Tastiness: 11/10

My favourite breakfast item and a classic Senegalese dish. Petit pois is essentially seasoned mushy peas in a baguette but it's amazing! This is a staple dish as it can be eaten for breakfast or for dinner and is very easy to make. We would normally eat breakfast at the schools or we would have it from a breakfast lady just down the street from us. Because we normally ate at the same place each day, we started to get to know them quite well and of course we're easily recognised being the only whites! All of the ladies that we went to were always super friendly with us (despite the fact they'd been up since 5am each morning!) and most made an effort to know our names, speak the very little English that they knew and make sure we were forgotten about in the morning rush. In Senegal, queues don't really exist so you have to be brave and push your money forward in order to order your baguette. Fortunately, the women were always very kind towards me and directly asked me my order as they could see that I wasn't confident enough to push past the crowds of students around me. Another sign of Senegalese kindness. It always made me feel more at ease with the women and breakfast slowly became the meal that I looked forward to the most. Our landlord's wife was also a "breakfast lady". She would sell all kinds of baguettes and fillings at a CEM in the morning and was very keen to get us to visit her and have her breakfast. And, of course her being Senegalese, she normally gave us a coffee or some mayonnaise for free – much appreciated! We eventually persuaded our hosts to teach us to make petit pois which ended up taking longer than we expected, showing once again that cooking is no mean feat in Senegal.



Ingredients

Peas

Water

Chilli powder

Pepper

Potatoes

Onions

Bicarbonate of Soda

Salt

Baguette

Instructions

1. Soak petit pois (*peas*) and bicarb of soda in boiled water for at least 2hrs then when they're soft, remove from heat and leave to rest
2. When ready to cook, put peas back on stove and steam until they're cooked
3. Cut potatoes and onions up then fry the potatoes
4. Fry a bit of onions until they're red and then add rest of onions, about 750ml of water and peas
5. Add salt, chilli powder and pepper
6. Mix then boil whole mixture until water has disappeared
7. Add potatoes and then serve with bread

Crème Glace— Jus de Bouye and Bissap

Meal: Snack

Prepared by: Women

Prep Time: 30mins

Level of tastiness: 100/10

Our favourite hot afternoon treat!! These small, frozen juices were the perfect thing to have after a hot day at school or during an especially hot afternoon. Being 50cfa (6p) they were ideal and were an absolute lifesaver once we had discovered them. These were sold at schools, at the garage and even just from inside people's homes. Luckily for us, our landlord's wives made the best Bouye on a frequent basis and then our other friend also began to make them so we had plenty of options. The making of the juice is relatively simple but of course they make very little money once you've paid off expenses. Our friend just along the street made the ice creams so that she had a little more money to buy treats for her children. She became like a Senegalese mum to us after we began cooking together on a regular basis. Her story was an especially hard one to hear, once we discovered she had married at 15, had a child and then her husband divorced her shortly after. She is now 32, with 5 children (her first daughter, with her first husband, she hasn't seen in 4 years) and is living with her in-laws. Unfortunately, in Senegal, if you are a woman and marry into a family, you then must do all the housework for your in-laws. In this household, there are 2 women who have married into the family and therefore, day in day out they do the cooking, cleaning, and the hand-washing of all their children's clothes. On top of looking after newborn babies, this leads to an exhausting life which is also quite stressful at times when money is running low. We found that this family was one of the most generous as they would constantly give us meals for free, fruit and the beloved "crème glaces". Our friend who makes these would make them normally in the afternoon after already having cooked the lunch and cleaned the house or in the early morning before doing this. She would then go out with her baby on her back and sell them in the hot sun to get just a little bit of money for her children. As she told us multiple times, "life for an African woman is very hard". I have a lot of respect and admiration for her and also a lot to thank her for as she taught us most of the cooking that we learnt in Senegal.



Ingredients

Bouye fruit

Sugar

Powdered milk

Water

Flavouring (banana essence or orange flower water)

Instructions

1. Soak the bouye fruit in water and separate the white bouye from the black seeds
2. Pour it through a sieve to separate the liquid from the seeds
3. Add powdered milk, sugar and flavouring (banana/orange flower water)
4. Mix and then freeze to make "crème glaces" or drink immediately as Jus de Bouye



Breakfast rush at the CEM



Bouye crème glaces after a hot walk to the CEM



Morning market haul for lunch



Learning to make the "mouss" for the attaya



Attaya "mouss" being made by the pro!



Bouye and Bissap at the market



Bouye and popcorn for our end of year FASJOM party

These are just four of my favourite food/drinks that we had in Senegal and only a very small selection of the wonders that Senegal has to offer. I believe that without cooking, my experience in Senegal would've been very different and nowhere near as successful or fun. I now look at cooking in a new light and it's thanks to all the incredible, strong and wonderful women that I met and who helped me to learn the basics of Senegalese cooking.