

DAMNED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

A photograph of a slum area with damaged buildings and children playing in the debris. The image is overlaid with a large, semi-transparent globe graphic. The globe shows the continents of Africa and Europe, with a color gradient from blue to yellow to red. The background image shows a dirt path in a slum, with several children playing. In the background, there are several small, dilapidated buildings with cracked walls and some debris. The overall scene suggests the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities.

**A SERIE OF INTERVIEWS ON THE
VICTIMS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

**ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG
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THE BASSARIS

Interview with Ithiar Bindia

Who are the Bassaris?

The Bassari are a small ethnic group who are believed to have originated from southern African countries and are relatively unknown to the world. To this day, the Bassari have managed to meticulously preserve their culture, traditions, and customs despite all the hardships they encounter. Even in the face of Jihad wars that have converted a small portion of their community, (the Boyine), they continue to persist and fight for their land and people. The Bassari have isolated villages in the Republic of Guinea (specifically in the communes of Ethiolo and Oubadji), and in the Kédougou region of Senegal. They are close to the Bantu people, who've rejected Islam and fled to neighboring countries like Guinea, Senegal, and Guinea Bissau in an effort to preserve their traditions. Like the Bantu, the Bassari have refused to convert to Islam, opting instead to maintain their traditional religion of animism.

What is their relationship with nature and how does it influence their way of life?

Similar to the primitive peoples of Africa, the Bassari once lived a nomadic life of hunting, gathering, foraging, and fishing. However as their communities continued to evolve, the Bassari settled down, building stonewalled homes with thatched roofs and adopting agriculture as their primary food source, thus becoming farmers. As farmers, the Bassari quickly realized that good harvests required good soil; they needed fields rich in humus and natural fertilizers. Living in their thatch roofed homes in the middle of the thick bush, they were quick to understand that everything they have was given to them by the grace of the land that hosts them. Therefore, they consider themselves men of the forest, meaning they themselves are elements of nature. Being a part of nature means the Bassari have an intrinsic duty to defend and protect the environment they rely on.



What are masks for, and what is their role in the culture and in the preservation of the environment?

Masks serve to embody the prohibitions and boundaries of protected areas, utilizing their supernatural powers to keep these areas safe and protect their natural harmony.

How do they preserve nature?

For centuries, the Bassari have established sacred cultural norms and traditions involving masks and dialans for the effective preservation of the environment.





How do the Bassari teach their children about their environment and its importance?

Improper environmental education is closely linked to damaging agricultural activities, natural resource exploitation, and other harmful activities such as honey harvesting. Unlike most other communities, the Bassari children are taught to embrace nature at a young age and to always do things in the least harmful way. As children, they are taught how to properly clear fields so the soil stays fertile. They're instructed on how to cut trees in a way to not only avoid killing the tree, but also allow it to regrow. The young Bassari are taught from an early age that bushfires are strictly prohibited and are only allowed special with permission from the landowner and the spirits of the sacred Anet mountain. These young Bassari also learn how to harvest honey using smoke from animal dung instead of fire to avoid destroying bee colonies and hives. As such, harmonizing with nature is integrated into their way of life at a young age.



How does climate change impact the Bassari communities?

The Bassari people have been severely impacted by climate change. Groundnuts, millet, and fonio are their main source of food and crop, all of which need lengthy rainy seasons. These crops are unique in that they are incredibly nutrient-dense but require a lot of water. The introduction of climate change has caused the Bassari to choose short-cycle crops such as sorghum which are not as nutrient dense and also don't produce as much yield at the end of the harvest. Also, As a result of climate change, the straw that the Bassaris use to thatch the roofs of their huts and craft traditional masks has been declining in quality. The straw thatch roofs used to last 4 years before having to be replaced. Today the straw has lost its toughness, and due to the scarcity of rain, it has to be renewed every year.

ITHIAR BINDIA

Ilthiar Bindia, is a 68 year old retired teacher and former Sous Prefet, originally from the Bassari village of Ethiouar. He is currently serving as the regional coordinator of APAC in Kédougou and a member of the 'Writers Committee' in the region of Kédougou. He is the author of "*Kema Bailéhé La petite Bassari*".

