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Senegal first impressions - The Other Side:

The last time I wrote about all of the good parts of life in Senegal. I thought I might be coming across as a trifle Polyanna-ish. So, I thought I might give you a peek at the dark side, as much as I've seen in my first five days. Bear in mind that my limited view makes me like the proverbial blind man who seeks to describe an elephant after feeling only his trunk.

First and foremost is the unemployment: 48% according to a recent report. You can see the results everywhere. People just hanging around. Every time you leave your car for any length of time, you're immediately surrounded by a group. You must appoint one of them as car guard. Cost: \$0.16. Then someone always wants to act as your guide. I stopped at a Shell station because I heard there was an ATM there. I asked a man where it was. He pointed around the side of the station. When I came back to the car he demanded \$1.50 for sharing his vast wisdom. I merely got into the car and drove off.

Our perspective is changing because of this plethora of under-utilized labor. Anne and I went to the local hardware store today to buy a lawn sprinkler. We suddenly stopped and said, "Wait a minute. Why would we buy this labor-saving device? Omar, the day guard, doesn't have enough to keep him busy as it is."

On the streets everyone is selling something. They must be selling to each other: watches, peanuts (the country's largest crop), toothpicks, coat hangars – products from which you wonder how they can make a living.

The infrastructure is fairly primitive. We live on the major road to the airport – two, sometimes four lanes. Many of the side roads are sand. Not many stop signs exist. The only rule existent to my eyes is: Priority to the right. As with the French language, there are always exceptions.