

Lagardère TR provides strong local flavour in Africa

Sountou Bousso, the newly appointed Lagardère Travel Retail CEO for Senegal and Gabon is relishing the opportunity to maximise the potential of the company's African duty free and travel retail business.

A Senegalese citizen, Bousso **joined the company** from global catering company Newrest, where he most recently served as general manager for Cameroon and Senegal.



Sountou Bousso, CEO Senegal and Gabon, Lagardère Travel Retail .

During his time at Newrest, Bousso gained a glimpse of Lagardère's Senegal operations at Blaise Diagne International Airport which commenced in 2017. This followed the capture of a 10-year **\$575 million contract** encompassing a duty free store and Relay outlet.

Over in Gabon, Lagardère Travel Retail signed a service agreement with GSEZ Airport, a subsidiary of Gabon Special Economic Zone (*a private partnership between Olam International, the Gabonese Republic and Africa Finance Corporation*) to operate at Libreville Leon Mba Airport in 2019. The retailer has the exclusive right to run over 600sq m of retail and food.

CUSTOMERS SEEK BEST POSSIBLE SERVICE

"Customers are looking for the best possible service," Bousso told *TRBusiness* in a revealing interview. "The African market is becoming increasingly sophisticated in line with rising incomes and is also very diversified.

"Passengers shopping in our African stores are happy to find everything in one place. This includes perfumes and cosmetics from the world's largest luxury brands and a selection of local craft products highlighting the region's know-hows."

Local products are given a central space in Dakar at Blaise Diagne International Airport.

He added: "This combination is key to our success. It enables our customers, whether they are African nationals, business travellers or tourists to access a broad choice of high-quality products at duty free prices."

Local products are allocated a large central space in the Dakar store at Blaise Diagne International Airport. This highlights the talents of Senegalese entrepreneurs and craftsmen. "We showcase local cosmetics, food or jewellery brands. The store design itself is inspired by South Senegal. This gives local products even more focus. We want to promote out talented local craftsmen."

Lagardère Travel Retail does not only meet shoppers' expectations across its African businesses, it also supports the local economy and value chain by sourcing many products locally.

An exterior shot of the Lagardère Travel Retail Relay outlet at Blaise Diagne International Airport in Senegal.

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An example of this was when Bousso's predecessor Bruno Bouchacourt, who has retired from Lagardère after two decades, once discovered a local jam producer. His aim was to introduce her products in the retailer's shops.

Bouchacourt assisted her with the development of the business so the jams were manufactured in accordance with Lagardère Travel Retail's quality standards. In turn, the producer was able to create additional jobs for women in her community.

"This kind of success story, which puts ethics and people back at the centre will ensure the sustainable and profitable growth of our industry."

CONSOLIDATION OBJECTIVE

Growing the company's businesses in Senegal and Gabon and consolidating its position as the leading international retailer in West Africa are important objectives. Bousso said: "It's a very competitive market, but today we remain the preferred partner for airports in Western Africa.

"Our commitment to operational excellence and proximity is making the difference wherever we are. The in-store experience we offer will always need to be an exceptional moment when travellers feel they're our guests and when we go the extra mile to deliver the best service possible to them."

Lagardère Travel Retail signed a service agreement with GSEZ Airport, a subsidiary of Gabon Special Economic Zone (a private partnership between Olam International, the Gabonese Republic and Africa Finance Corporation) to operate at Libreville Leon Mba Airport in Gabon last year.

At the moment, however, traffic levels are low in Senegal and Gabon and business has been hit hard by the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. This has forced Lagardère to be agile and flexible. "We are fully confident activity will return and have managed to retain all our staff. As a result, we can capitalise on their experience and business knowledge for the recovery."

The early signs of recovery in Senegal and Gabon over the past few months have been encouraging, according to Bousso. That said, there is a long way to go until traffic reaches pre-Covid-19 levels. "In the meantime, we are working hard to make our business more efficient and agile to capitalise on the returning traffic."

A strong local product offer is also in place at Libreville Leon Mba International Airport in Gabon.

Restoring the faith of consumers will be the main challenge in the post Covid-19 world, but Bousso is not expecting any new purchasing trends among African consumers. "We're actually anticipating an acceleration of existing trends. Customers will be happy to return to stores and buy their favourite products after a long period without travelling.

"We treat customers as our guests. Each of them receives our full attention to make their experience a very special one."

See the [November edition](#) of TRBusiness for the full interview with Sountou Bousso, CEO, Senegal and Gabon, Lagardère Travel Retail.

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