The recurring floods experienced in recent years by many urban centres in West Africa are not merely the consequence of global climate change. Large parts of the poor urban populations in West Africa often live in hazardous areas where urban planning is inadequate and where the public services, infrastructure and protective regulations that are needed in order to face flood issues are poorly provided. As a result, recurrent flooding reinforces existing social inequalities and the vulnerability of the urban poor. This does, however, not mean that the delivery of collective services related to flood response does not exist or that it is ungoverned. In order to cope with inefficient public service provision, the inhabitants often organize to ensure that flooding is addressed. This study shows that in Pikine, a city located at the outskirts of Dakar (Senegal), the governance of floods entails the daily coproduction of flood prevention and adaptation services, where users play an important and active role. The authors show that this ‘palliative governance’ has a direct impact on vulnerable populations’ capacity to cope with and adapt to recurrent flooding. The authors show that the informality that is essential to the coproduction of services should not be seen as an opposition to the State, but rather as essential to the daily functioning of the state, as well as a manifestation of ordinary citizenship by residents of deprived neighbourhoods.