

## PolicyPennings by Daryll E. Ray & Harwood D. Schaffer

# Senegal officials praise the holistic development efforts of ecovillages

Ousmane Aly Pame told the December 14, 2014 closing session of the Global Ecovillage Summit about the ecovillage of Bacoumbel (Sweet Baobab in the language of the Serere). Pame, who is the President of Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) for Africa, said that Bacoumbel has installed an electrical system that includes street lights, house lights, and lighting in school classrooms. In the classrooms, children are able to use computers and the internet.

The installation of a solar electrical system has protected the community from the high prices of purchasing electricity from the national grid, which depends, for most of its power, on diesel fuel. The community has planted and maintained organic orchards, which include different species that bear fruit year-round.

The village member use the fruit for household consumption and the remainder is sold. In Bacoumbel, the village now manages its financial resources instead of having them managed at the state level.

Participating in this closing session of the Summit were three representatives of the Senegalese government who addressed the attendees. The Grand Serigne de Dakar Abdoulaye Makhtar Diop, Supreme Head of the Leboue Community (the fishing community who were the first settlers of Dakar), expressed his pride and joy that the ecovillage movement in Senegal started in his community, Yoff. Senegalese Advising Minister Mr. Youssou Ndour was in attendance along with Mademoiselle Ndiaye who represented the Senegalese Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development. Also on the dais was Kosha Joubert, President of the Global Ecovillage Network.

The Grand Serigne of Dakar previously served Senegal as Minister of Youth, Minister of Decentralization, and the Civil Administrator of Ecole Nationale de Administration Magistrateur—the premier training program for administrative government officials.

He said that if people can produce biogas, thus saving on electrical bills and stopping deforestation, they will also produce an improved environment and enjoy a better lifestyle. In addition, with these savings, their children can obtain a better education.

Some weeks earlier, he said, he was in a meeting of West African traditional leaders and felt that something was missing in the discussion. That something was the ecovillage concepts because these can make the link between modernity and tradition in a holistic way. The ecovillage principles provide these leaders with up-to-date information in a way that respects their traditions, thus helping them meet the needs of their different communities. The Grand Serigne said he was

glad to be onboard and GEN can rely on his support.

Mr. Ndour, who previously held the post of Minister of Tourism and Development, told the attendees that he was grateful to the Summit participants from other countries for their courage to come to Dakar during this time in which Ebola has made people afraid to come to any country in West Africa, though only 3 countries in the area are experiencing an outbreak of the disease. He said that their coming to Senegal shows their courage and passion for the ecovillages. He said he hopes that all of the participants will post a picture of themselves with a picture of the Senegalese flag on Facebook and say, “I was there.”

In addition to a successful career as a singer, and government official he is owner of the press group GFM (Global Futures Media). He also owns the major newspaper in Senegal, the Observer, and plans to make a documentary film to promote the ideas involved in the development of ecovillages.

He told those in attendance that the Prime Minister had issued a new territorial order that would restore the dignity of villages and rural areas. In the past, by dividing the country into cities, villages, and rural areas, the residents of the latter two were looked upon as people who were inferior, as people who did not know much. As a result of the reform, the people in these areas now have the same financial support, governmental powers, and attention that were previously given only to municipalities.

The work the country is now doing in ecovillages has improved the quality of schoolwork of the children. As a result, the quality of living in ecovillages can be equal to or better than some of the richest neighborhoods in Dakar, he said referring to earlier remarks by Pame. Ndour said that the villages of Africa need this path to development and the Senegalese government fully supports GENSEN (Global Ecovillage Network, Senegal) and GEN Africa and will do their best to find GEN a headquarters in Dakar. He said he has accepted the responsibility to become an ambassador of GEN Africa, not because he was invited, but because he believed in their activities.

Madam Ndiaye, the third Senegalese government to speak, began her remarks by recalling the Prime Minister’s speech at the Opening Ceremony of the event when he reminded the audience that the path to emergence will include the quest for holistic Senegal development which places humanity and its environment at the heart of any social development project. She said, “It is Senegal’s honor to host the Summit

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which includes the recognition by the Global Ecovillage Network of the initiative of Senegal which has created an agency to support the world ecovillage dynamic. The word ecovillage is a relevant translation of an inclusive holistic sustainable development process which uses the assets and values the good practices and the knowledge of local communities for an emergent Senegal.”

She continued, “I am delighted to remark that at the end of your work, the guidelines you have given are perfectly in line with the vision of the President of Senegal and his government. I would like to express my appreciation for the work you have accomplished and offer a special congratulation to the Presidents of GEN International and GEN Africa. From this podium, I would like to congratulate the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development for what this national agency has achieved on the ground.

“My words of congratulations also include the NGOs who are supportive of the ecovillage movement and invite them to get closer to the National Ecovillage Agency by taking on ownership of the national program and the national ecovillage strategy that is being implemented with the support of the Global

Environment Fund, the United Nations Development Program and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency. Soon this will include the support of the northern fund for the region of Kedougou in working on the growth of the product value chain in order to mitigate the emission of greenhouse gases and fight against poverty.

“One of the key learning events during the Summit is the visits that participants are making to ecovillages like Bacoumbel, Ndem, and Guédé Chantier. These visits affirm our belief that the Senegalese ecovillage effort is moving in the right direction.”

On their behalf, the participants in the Global Ecovillage Summit expressed their appreciation and support for the work of the Senegalese government in developing a holistic plan for the sustainable development of the communities of Senegal.

Daryll E. Ray holds the Blasingame Chair of Excellence in Agricultural Policy, Institute of Agriculture, University of Tennessee, and is the Director of UT’s Agricultural Policy Analysis Center (APAC). Harwood D. Schaffer is a Research Assistant Professor at APAC. (865) 974-7407; Fax: (865) 974-7298; [dray@utk.edu](mailto:dray@utk.edu) and [hdschaffer@utk.edu](mailto:hdschaffer@utk.edu); <http://www.agpolicy.org>.