

# The Senegalese Ecovillage Network: The Past, Present and Future

By Troy Olivier



## Foreword

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We stand at a defining moment in human history. Rapid population growth, an obsessive consumption-driven economy and a continuing inability to accept that there are limits to growth have led to unsustainable human activities on our planet. If current consumption and population patterns continue, it is estimated that by the 2030's we will require the equivalent of two earths to support us (Global Footprint Network 2013). This ecological overshoot is resulting in diminishing fisheries, severe deforestation, depletion of fresh water systems, and the build-up of harmful greenhouse gas emissions. The latter has serious consequences for global warming.

Global mean warming, is 0.8°C above pre industrial levels while oceans have warmed by 0.09°C since the 1950s leading to a 20cm rise in sea levels since pre-industrial times (WB 2012). This has caused an exceptional number of extreme heat waves, severe drought in major food crop growing areas, major floods and increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather, in turn putting severe pressure on human systems, ecosystems, and associated services.

Adverse effects of global warming and the failures of a consumption driven global economy effect many of the world's poorest areas, with the most economic and socially disadvantaged forecast to bear most of the brunt of ecological exhaustion and climate change (UNDP 2011). This is particularly true in sub-Saharan Africa, where it is likely to undermine development efforts and goals. Senegal as one of the most vulnerable and least resilient countries to climate change (ND-GAIN 2013)

Scientists across the world are nearly unanimously predicting that without serious policy and lifestyle changes the world is on track for a 4°C rise in global temperatures before the end of the century (WB 2012), leading to a world characterized by high uncertainty and new risks that would threaten our ability to anticipate and plan for future adaptation needs (WB 2012). Preventing this predicted rise, while dealing with climate change and its environmental, economic and social consequences, is no doubt the greatest challenge for human security in the 21st century.

Furthermore, the current global capitalist economy, over reliant on fossil fuels for global growth, is not only responsible for environmental crisis, but is responsible for increased stress, anxiety and social disintegration (Norberg-Hodge 2011a).

Clearly there is an urgent need for sustainable human activities on our planet, which will require alternative forms of sustainable living and societal organisation. One movement operating on a global scale which is critically engaging with the failings of the global capitalist economy is the Ecovillage movement (EVM).

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## Introduction & Definitions

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### INTRODUCTION

In this report I will focus on investigating the development of the Senegalese Ecovillage Network. Senegal is particularly fascinating as it contains a vast range of Ecovillages which have emerged in a variety of different circumstances, involving an array of committed actors. It is unique in that it currently possesses the only national government Ecovillage program (ANEV) which ambitiously aims to transform 14,000 rural indigenous communities into Ecovillages. However, Ecovillage development in Senegal actually started well before the government program at the grassroots level and mobilised into an organisation that became known as GENSEN (Senegal's regional branch of GEN). In recognition of both governmental and grassroots actors vision and commitment to Ecovillage development, Senegal was chosen by the Global Ecovillage Network to host its annual summit, which took place in Dakar, in December 2014.

This report will focus on exploring the two major actors in Senegalese Ecovillage development; ANEV and GENSEN, as well as taking a look at the emergence of Ecovillage development in neighbouring Gambia. A section of the report will be dedicated to illuminating what life is like for Ecovillagers on the ground containing raw insights from different communities in Senegal and the Gambia. Finally, we will analyse both Ecovillage programs and how they could fit into GEN' strategy of 'scaling-up' the Ecovillage ideal and what this could mean for Ecovillage development in Senegal and Africa. Before we take an in-depth look at the Senegalese Ecovillage Network it is important we explore some key concepts and actors in the global Ecovillage movement (EVM)



**Photo:** A women walks through the rice paddies in the Ecovillage of Guede Chantier, Senegal

## WHAT IS AN ECOVILLAGE?

Defining an Ecovillage is not an easy task due to the number of diverse perceptions that exist within the movement and the variety of Ecovillages that exist on the ground. As Geri Mitchell (PI: 2013), a key facilitator in the emergence of the Gambian Network puts it: *“There are as many different types of Ecovillages as there are Ecovillages”*.

However, for the purpose of report it is important to have a basic definition in order to compare and contrast the different types of Ecovillage development taking place in Senegal. GEN’s own definition which offers a practical degree of detail serves this purpose:

*“An Ecovillage is an intentional or traditional community using local participatory processes to holistically integrate ecological, economic, social and cultural dimensions of sustainability in order to regenerate social and natural environments”* (GEN n.d (b))

GEN's definition encompasses the four key dimensions considered by those within the global Ecovillage movement (EVM) to be fundamental to Ecovillage development; ecological, economic, social and cultural. These four dimensions are outlined in considerable detail in four in-depth publications compiled by Gaia Education. The cultural dimension is also referred to as the spiritual or worldview dimension in many GEN publications. While GEN's definition is still far from comprehensive, this appears to be deliberate, as pluralism and diversity within the movement is highly treasured (Meeson 2013). Ecovillages can be intentional or traditional, emerging according to the characteristics of the natural environment in which they are set, while their ongoing development is often shaped by the advantages and challenges that are often unique to each location.

Throughout EVM literature Ecovillages are often referred to as ‘laboratories of sustainable living’ offering tried and tested methods of best practices for the planning and reorganization of our societies. Ecovillages combine a supportive and high-quality social environment with a low-impact way of life (East 2008).



**Photo:** Women in Guede Chantier tend to their organic farm

## THE ECOVILLAGE MOVEMENT (EVM)

The EVM recognises that human activities on our planet have become unsustainable and has developed a comprehensive philosophy of an alternative sustainable social organisation; evident in the growing number of communities around the world known as Ecovillages. The EVM is a movement of direct action in which members assume a DIY (do-it-yourself) mentality to the development of their local community (Meeson 2013), thus, building the society they want on a small scale, often literally from the ground up. This movement is far from homogenous, comprising a wide range of communities and local initiatives across the world expressing different views and often having little interaction with each other.

However more recently Ecovillages are being increasingly connected to each other and given a voice on the international stage through an organisation known as the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). The EVM is gaining prominence in Africa where it is considered an effective community-led sustainable development strategy for rural indigenous communities in the developing world (PI: Joubert 2013).



**Photo:** A Fisherman rests against his boat in the Ecovillage of Kartong in the Gambia

## THE GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK (GEN)

GEN (which is registered as a charity in Scotland) is the most significant and recognisable actor in the EVM. Founded in 1995, GEN is a solution-based, multi-stakeholder alliance, specialising in providing: *"Information, tools, examples and global representation to the expanding network of those dedicated to developing and demonstrating sustainability principles and practices in their lifestyles and communities around the world."* (GEN n.d (b), p1)

GEN and sister organisation Gaia Education have produced publications, courses and conferences which are contributing to an increasingly coherent philosophy. Working in partnership with communities, universities, NGO's, corporations, government agencies and international organisations such as the United Nations, GEN takes an *"inclusive developmental approach"* (PI: Joubert 2014). GEN has consultative status within UN-ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) and is a partner of the UNITAR-CIFAL initiative, which provides trainings in sustainable development to local governmental officials around the world. Gaia Education focuses on producing curricula for sustainable community design, drawing upon the best practises evident in Ecovillages worldwide. One of the best known examples of this is the Ecovillage Design Education curriculum (EDE), which is considered a comprehensive introduction to sustainable design and development (East 2008). GEN and Gaia Education are increasingly being seen as the global face of the EVM, adding a more coherent identity to a diverse globally scattered movement.

GEN-International predominantly works through five regional organisations: the Ecovillage Network of the North Americas (ENA), the Latin American Ecovillage Network (El Consejo de Asentamientos Sustentables de las Américas / CASA), GEN Oceania and Asia (GENOA), GEN-Europe/Middle East (GEN-Europe), and GEN-Africa. Another important actor is NextGEN which focuses on engaging and empowering youth in the EVM. These networks comprise of at least 10,000 communities on the ground in more than 100 countries worldwide and are rapidly expanding (Joubert 2015). Through the sharing of best practice and innovative solutions, and the honouring of deep-rooted traditional knowledge and local cultures that exist throughout GEN's Networks, GEN is creating a pool of wisdom for sustainable living on a global scale. GEN is committed to furthering and promoting the philosophy of thinking globally while acting locally. (Joubert, 2015)

Ultimately, GEN believes that their track record in Carbon footprint reduction (Tinsley & George 2006) puts them in an excellent position to establish partnerships between sustainable living projects in the North and South (GEN n.d (d)). While in the North efforts focus on communal scaling down of ecological footprints, the South efforts are focused on 'scaling up', using appropriate sustainable technologies and working with existing under-utilised indigenous knowledge to meet basic needs (Joubert 2010). The EVM believes that post-industrial people in the global north can learn from the social systems of solidarity that still exist in communities of the global South (Zeitlin et al 2007). Providing space for this learning process will lead to valuable knowledge exchanges (Ibid).



### Context & Justification

ANEV was created in August 2008 as a 'radical alternative' to solve the developmental problems that plague Senegal while contributing to the global effort to fight climate change. Operating at the national level ANEV ambitiously plans to turn 14,000 rural communities into Ecovillages across all 8 of Senegal's regions. Senegal is ranked 163<sup>rd</sup> in the Human Development Index (HDI 2015) and poverty is considered by the government to be much worse in rural areas (PI: Sal 2015). Traditional developmental policies to solve this had been ineffective in the rural context. The current way of life in rural villages is considered unsustainable and is leading to mass immigration to urban areas. Furthermore, the government recognised that low quality of life was having serious consequences for local environments as rural dwellers looked to exploit their natural environment for any monetary gain (ANEV 2012).

It was clear that new strategies and investment were required to solve these problems. New energy efficient technologies and sustainable practices were increasingly being seen as the best way to increase standards of living, increase incomes and protect the environment. These new ways of thinking were embraced at the governmental level and personally endorsed by Abdoulaye Wade, (President of Senegal 2000-12) culminating in the formation of Agence Nationale des Ecovillages (ANEV) programme. The program has gained support internationally from the Japan International Cooperation Agency, The United Nations Development Program and the Global Environment Facility.



**Photo:** A picture is worth a thousand words. The developmental problems evident in a northern Senegalese village close to the Ecovillage of Guede Chantier

## Aims & Objectives

The main aim of the ANEV program is to turn half of all Senegal's rural communities (14,000) into Ecovillages over a 10 year period with a substantial budget of 10.76 billion CFA (ANEV n.d). For ANEV, Ecovillage development had four main components; 1/ Good local governance 2/ Self-sufficiency 3/ Renewable energy & the preservation of natural resources 4/ promotion of private sector and sustainable financing. By achieving success in these four key areas of Ecovillage development locally ANEV also aim to contribute to a number of national development targets (ANEV n.d) including:

- Contributing to national and world reduction of CO2 emissions
- Conservation of natural environments and animals
- Contributing experiences to global community
- Reinforcing carbon sinks
- Increase agricultural production and biodiversity
- Improve soil preservation and enrichment
- Increase food sufficiency
- Prevent migration of youth to urban areas

However, as ANEV is the first national government to launch an Ecovillage program they were required to undertake a pilot study during the first 3 years of the program. This included 11 villages that were chosen around Senegal to represent the differing rural contexts that exist within the country. The Pilot phase was considered a success and the government is now continuing with its named Implementation phase.



**Photo:** A signpost to one of the earliest adopters of the ANEV program. The ecovillage of Backombel, about 3hrs drive from Dakar

## ANEV Approach to Ecovillage Development

### Criteria for the selection of Ecovillages

Selecting which communities were to be turned into Ecovillages was based on the following criteria (ANEV 2012):

- Motivation and engagement of local population
- Stability and social cohesion
- State of natural resources and the environment
- Availability of resources – especially soil
- Presence of other projects or programs to facilitate and create synergies with Ecovillage program – financial perspective
- Accessibility
- Size of migrations to urban areas
- Size of villages
- Evidence of successful community development
- Geographical spread

Once villages had been selected the focus turned to mobilising support for the Ecovillage concept. This involved a number of meetings with the community that help to identify appropriate training needs and community sensitization programs. Subsequently, ANEV would begin to introduce measures that would allow it to achieve success in each of the four components it considers essential to successful ecovillage development (MEDD n.d):

#### **1/ Good Local Governance**

Promote good local governance through a program of participatory development with central and local institutions benefiting from good political and judiciary support. Give local people a better quality of life by improving access to social services and equal rights. Improving all aspects of local governance would primarily be achieved by:

- Organise community sensitisation programs with local communities
- Organise meetings with villagers and local elected representatives
- Train committees responsible for Ecovillage development

#### **2/Self-sufficiency in food**

Aim to make Ecovillages food self-sufficient through appropriate pastoral development. Raise agricultural production through developing local capacities to increase water resources for food production. Achieving self-sufficiency in food production is also considered key to raising local revenues. Increasing food self-sufficiency was to be achieved by:

- Finding a water source in each Ecovillage and equip with pumps that work via solar energy
- Introduce sanitation systems
- Introduce irrigation systems
- Diversification and intensification of agricultural production

- Produce action plan for soil protection and water conservation
- increase livestock production
- Introduce bee hives

### **3/ Renewable energies & the preservation of natural resources**

This component of the program was seen to have several objectives. Firstly, to mitigate against the negative effects of climate change. Secondly to promote renewable energies and energy efficiency in target villages. Thirdly, to reduce carbon emissions through better land management and restoration of natural resources. Finally to preserve biodiversity and fight against soil degradation. This component of the program included:

- Introducing public lighting fuelled by solar energy
- Solar energy kits for domestic use and installing hydraulic pumps
- Promotion of biofuel production through dispersing Jatropha seeds in Ecovillages
- Introduce bio-digesters into Ecovillages
- Set up community spaces with trees and nurseries for plants
- Plant fruit trees in Ecovillages
- Reforestation of Ecovillage area
- Introduce composting and recycling

### **4/ Promotion of the private sector and sustainable financing**

Promoting sustainable finance through local private sector development centred on new opportunities emerging as a result of Ecovillage development. This included:

- A valuation to determine the economic value of services provided by the natural environment and how restoring the environment could increase the value (eg/ potential for carbon credits and the benefits of communal forests and vegetation)
- Promotion of a self-financing water system
- Introducing a community health committee
- Reaching out and forming partnerships with sustainable financing institutions that can provide credit to local organisations and population in a transparent and efficient manner.
- Set up a loan repayment system for new infrastructure improvements (eg/ solar panels and biodigesters)
- Set up local markets for products produced in Ecovillages



## Analysis of ANEV Program

With the Pilot study being judged a success ANEV are now fully engaged in the implementation phase of their Ecovillage program. However the hugely ambitious target of turning 14,000 rural communities into Ecovillages is now being seen as unrealistic and, at least in the short term, essentially unachievable. According to ANEV's expert in agro-forestry, Adama Kone, there are currently only *"84 Ecovillages around Senegal which can be considered operational"* (PI: Kone 2015). ANEV are now targeting 500 by 2017 but this too is considered only a distinct possibility within the organisation. However, within the 84 Ecovillages ANEV are convinced they are already seeing some very positive outcomes.

For instance, Ibrahima Sal, in charge of Monitoring & Evaluation, claims there is already evidence of increasing economic growth, agricultural production and self-sufficiency, which are slowing the rural exodus (PI: Sal 2015). This also appears to be backed up from Ecovillagers on the ground with one young baker in Bakombel (one of the earliest ANEV Ecovillages) stating: *"we now are working more in the fields and producing more vegetables. Before we sit in the village with nothing to do, with no jobs. This meant lots of people used to leave to go to other towns to work. Now we live here and only go to other towns to sell our vegetables and get our money. Young people are not leaving anymore"* (PI: M2).

Furthermore, there are also signs that electricity powered by solar panels (given to Ecovillages in the form of a loan) are having drastic impacts on the lives of rural villagers. Villagers in Bakombel describe a range of benefits from having access to energy, from being able to bake their own bread in the town to charging a phone (something villagers previously had to spend an entire day walking to the next village to do) (PI:M1-M4). Villagers also described feeling more connected to the outside world as they now are able to use computers *"We can now start to learn something about the internet and connect to other people which is something we really like."* (PI: M1). Another unintended positive outcome was a reduction in crime as one respondent describes *"Before thieves used to come and take our seeds and our livestock all the time and in the dark they stole a lot of things. In the dark people are too afraid to go out and confront the thieves so you just have to wait and see what has been taken. But since we have the light we have more security. Now when we think about Ecovillage we think about security."* (PI: M3).

ANEV being a national government-led program inevitably leads to a predominantly 'top-down' approach but there are also signs of some participatory development methods in their approach. A leader of the women's group in Bakombel described how the government had several meetings with the community before asking whether it would like to become an Ecovillage and that ANEV officials would often return to the town and ask what they would like help with next. She recalls one instance when *"ANEV came back and asked what do you want us to help you in? ' We would love to have in the village new seeds', we said. They bring seeds of tomatoes and citron and stuff like that. The population start making and growing this stuff very successfully"* (PI: M3).

Despite, these initial successes of the ANEV program, some academics, researchers and members of GEN remain deeply sceptical of ANEV's approach to Ecovillage development. The primary criticism of the ANEV program is that it is top-down and dominated by politics. GENSEN leaders believe that real fundamental change must come from below in order to have a lasting effect. As GEN-Africa

President Ousmane Pam puts it; “you have a very short time as a politician or someone working for the government to solve a problem so you go very fast and skip important and necessary steps for development like changing the culture. The government changes the infrastructure and the economy but not the culture which is problematic” (PI: Pam, A 2014).

Furthermore, the ANEV program is criticised for being one dimensional and not offering a holistic comprehensive philosophy. It is considered too focused on economic growth while neglecting educating villagers particularly in the social & cultural/worldview dimensions of Ecovillage development that are core to GEN philosophy (PI: Tamba, M 2014). There is no doubt that ANEV leader’s interpretations of Ecovillage development can also be considered one dimensional: “*The concept of an Ecovillage means to me a process which helps people to boost their economy*” (Kone 2015). Mohammed Tamba , a vocal critic of the ANEV, (PI: 2014) states; “*education is not in their program. We know we need to educate people about community and the environment in order to form more deep and meaningful connections that will empower them to live their life in a more moral, sustainable way*”. It is also evident on the ground in Bakombel that villagers primarily associate Ecovillage development with economic development. One villager explains; “*ANEV say a lot of things but the village understood that Ecovillage is working, having job that is all we understand from these meetings. Having job means having money and being able to take care of your family and that is all we want.*” (PI: M3). The lack of comprehensive philosophy concerns Abdourahamane Tamba who believes that “*as soon as government leaves these village people will retake their own habits*” (PI: Tamba, A 2014) and thus calls into question the legacy of ANEV’s work.

Hilton Simmet (2015), a researcher from Harvard University calls into question the integrity of the ANEV program claiming that instead of building capacity and self-sufficiency the ANEV program may actually be creating ‘dependence’. Furthermore, he believes that the ANEV program is in many ways a reversal of the Ecovillage ideal and suggested that government Ecovillage development was a “*valuable way to re-frame rural development for potential investors.*” (Simmet 2015, p136)

### Context & Justification

The same developmental problems that inspired the ANEV to launch its national program also played their part in inspiring the GENSEN program. However, GENSEN justification for its Ecovillage development goes deeper and is more holistic in its nature. Many GENSEN leaders and members believe that colonialism has returned to the global south in the form of globalization. By connecting to the EVM they hope to protect themselves against the harmful effects of globalization while introducing new ideas and green technologies to improve their quality of life (PI: Pam., Tamba, A., & Tamba, M 2014). Many traditions such as indigenous dance, music and art are now being lost as people watch football and western TV programs which contaminate children's minds with western propaganda (PI: Tamba, M 2014). GENSEN recognize that many traditional ways of doing things had value and should be reintroduced into villages for the sake of the environment and social cohesion.

Thus, a key difference from ANEV in terms of justification is that GENSEN does not believe Ecovillage development is a completely 'new' alternative. It holds that many traditional and indigenous villages in the global South were in the past (and in some cases still are) essentially Ecovillages: living in close-knit communities interacting intimately with the natural world and producing extremely low carbon footprints (PI: Pam., Tamba, A., & Tamba, M 2014). However, globalization and western-led development strategies are compromising self-sufficiency, community sensibility and the ability to live in harmony with the local environment, as Western ways of doing things encourage individualism and separate the concept of nature from human life (GENSEN Online).

Ecovillages appeal to rural communities in the developing world as they are community-led development initiatives, based around participatory design methods. This empowers locals to take ownership of their future by deciding what kind of sustainable development path they wish to follow and helps to build local capacity and create more resilient communities (PI: Pame 2013). As the president of GEN Africa, Ousmane Pam (from Senegal) puts it; *"GEN gave me hope to turn the development of my country around. GEN has wonderful coherent philosophy that allows me to organise my thoughts and ideas and put them into action on my own terms"* (PI:Pam 2015). Furthermore, both GENSEN leaders and ANEV believe that Ecovillage development is the best chance Senegal has of preventing the rural exodus.

## History of GENSEN

Although GENSEN was officially created in 2002 its roots can be traced all the way back to the Ecotricities and Ecovillages conference that took place in Yoff in 1996. IT was there that the concept EcoYoff concept was formalised. EcoYoff was the earliest experiment with Ecovillage development in Senegal and since then the Network as gradually grown into a network of 45 Ecovillages located all over Senegal where Senegalese and international partners live and work together (Simmet 2015).



**Photo:** Community spirit – A man from Guede Chantier poses by the young trees he is nurturing to plant all over the town

Thus, the GENSEN program dramatically predates the ANEV one and has accumulated years of valuable hands on experience when dealing with rural communities.

However, the development of GENSEN has often been difficult. One setback occurred when it emerged that it would not benefit from the large amount of UNDP funding going to the Senegalese government (Simmet 2015). Since then GENSEN has not had a formal office and although its actors are still very much active in the field there is less collaboration happening between them. Indeed a quick look at its website reveals that it has not been updated for several years (GENSEN Online 2015). Ousmane Pam (PI:2015) the current president of GENAFRICA believes that there are signs of the Network becoming more coherent again but donor funding is desperately needed in order to make GENSEN effective.



## The GENSEN Approach to Ecovillage Development

### **GENSEN Mission Statement (GENSEN Online 2015)**

GENSEN's Ecovillage development approach has four major objectives:

- a) To reinvigorate community life through the integration of traditional Senegalese knowledge with new and adapted technologies. This approach is based on a process of ecological reconstruction
- b) To explore ways of living that promote well-being and harmony between humans and their environment.
- c) To facilitate North/South dialogue and promote partnerships with the aim of cultivating solidarity and exchange.
- d) To promote sustainable community-led approaches to development in the areas of ecology, spirituality, innovation, participatory decision making and the economy.

### **How Ecovillages are chosen?**

GENSEN does not follow the ANEV approach of identifying villages under a strict set of criteria in order to turn into them Ecovillages. Rather, it waits for interested communities to reach out to the organisation before it begins working with communities in line with its bottom-up approach.

### **The Program & Philosophy**

GENSEN's program is more of a holistic philosophy in that Ecovillages are encouraged to explore their own needs rather than learn a set of core components that are uniformly rolled out across the network. Each Ecovillage is encouraged to find its own development path working with the challenges and advantages that each geographical and social situation presents (PI: Pam., Mitchell., Tamba, M 2014). Furthermore, the GENSEN approach is bottom-up in nature relying on participatory methods to shape development strategy in each Ecovillage.

The premise of GENSEN is to improve and protect all its member villages (currently 45) by striving for sustainability while preserving their heritage and natural environments. The GENSEN approach to development consists of four major pillars (GENSEN Online 2015):

- 1) **A Holistic Worldview**- including: socially engaged spirituality, listening to and connecting with nature, celebrating life and preserving the richness of ancient culture, traditional medicines and other indigenous ceremonies.
- 2) **Social Solidarity**- protecting all from the worst forms of poverty and alienation by: developing good leadership and governance, increasing education & health services, promoting non-violent conflict resolution, introducing transparent management systems and opening up lines of communication with the outside world
- 3) **A Sustainable Local Economy that is self-sufficient and not dependent on fossil fuels**- By Increasing local organic agricultural production & the variety of crops grown, Introducing microcredit and savings clubs and promoting responsible fishing and manufacturing.
- 4) **Restoring and protecting nature**- by creating durable and environmentally healthy settlements using renewable energy sources other appropriate sustainable technologies.

## Successes and Challenges

The success of the GENSEN Ecovillage program is very difficult to measure with each individual Ecovillage developing according to a unique set of characteristics and operating independently from another. However, overall there is no doubt that GENSEN's holistic 'hands on' Ecovillage development strategy, based around participatory methods (and which relies on potential Ecovillages reaching out to the network rather than being selected) has a more profound effect on changing local culture and consciousness. This change in consciousness has a range of positive effects for the environment and the social cohesion of rural Ecovillages.

For example, one respondent from Guede Chantier described a culture of cleanliness that has taken over since it became an Ecovillage: "Ecovillage development has increased community spirit and its infectious - if your neighbours are clean and you are not then you are disrespecting yourself and your community" (PI: G11 2014). While in the Ecovillage of Ndem, the holistic and spiritual approach to development has created a very unique atmosphere: "*What people were living at Ndem was not an endlessly ticking sense of accumulating dollar values, but a rhythm of devotion, which even included an idea of work expressed through forms conceived by us in the West as leisure: chanting, strumming, singing, and drumming*" (Simmet 2015, p97).

Furthermore, Ecovillagers living with GENSEN's influence have a wider understanding of the Ecovillage concept and associate it with primarily social and environment meanings. For instance, Mohammed Tamba states "*One word comes to mind when I think about Ecovillages and that is fairness. To be fair to each other and to be fair to nature. If fairness is the basis then we have good moral behaviour to everyone and everything, to the environment, to animals and to each other*" (PI: Tamba, M 2014). In Guede Chantier, one respondent described that an "*Ecovillage means taking care of the environment and the community. There are many social benefits to taking care of the environment. For example we have people planting many more trees in the community now since becoming an Ecovillage and now there are more places to talk in shade and find solidarity in each other*" (PI: G5 2014).

GENSEN's close collaboration with GEN-International (affectionately known as 'Mother GEN' within the Network) has been very advantageous and helped promote a visible coherent philosophy that has been instrumental in forming connections with organisations, researchers and sustainability experts. Furthermore, GEN's appreciation for indigenous knowledge and traditional culture set it apart from traditional Western development strategies and clearly resonate with many people living in the developing world. As a prominent GEN leader said: "*Gen showed me there was another way to develop our country. One that lets us decide what development we wanted to see. One that allowed us to keep hold of our indigenous culture and say no to the toxic materialistic propaganda that often comes with western influenced development strategies*" (PI: Pam 2014)

GEN has also helped organise EDE's in Senegal. These educational initiatives (which are missing from the ANEV program) are considered by the President of GEN-Africa, Ousmane Pam (PI: 2015) to be essential to meaningful Ecovillage development. He believes "*there is a really high demand for more educational initiatives like EDE's in Senegal*" and that GEN-International should increase efforts to organise these programs throughout Senegal and Africa.

Despite the positive developmental outcomes that are evident on the ground in Ecovillages under GENSEN's influence, the organisation itself is beset with structural problems. The organisation appears fragmented and disorganised. A history of internal quarrels has left the organisation without a clear direction, which leaves it unable to competently deal with the growing number of communities reaching out to it. In the last year 57 villages got in touch with various members of the network expressing desire to become Ecovillages (PI: Pam 2015). The network has no headquarters or offices currently in operation and has struggled to obtain consistent funding leaving it increasingly unable to *"fight on fair terms with the better-funded state program"* (Simmet 2015, p117). This lack of a solid organisational base makes it difficult to interact and form meaningful partnerships with donors or likeminded national or international organisations. Indeed many ANEV leaders have cited this lack of credibility as one of the reasons why closer collaboration between these two organisations has been unfeasible thus far (PI: Kone & Sal 2015).



**Photo:** Dusk in Guede Chantier. The landscape is more arid every year and the rainy/growing season become less intense and shorter in duration according to locals

## Gambian Ecovillage Development

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### Introduction

Ecovillage development in the Gambia began in Kartong which is an Islamic/Christian community of 4,000 inhabitants situated in the far south of the country. Primary activities are farming and fishing, with increasing engagement in ecotourism. It is through the strong link with a local ecotourism project called Sandele that the village was exposed to Ecovillage ideas and philosophies. Sandele is a revolutionary project in that it has leased a section of coastal land for 25 years, after which land and buildings will be handed back to Kartong (PI: Arkalo, Phillips 2014). Sandele employs 31 people, 80% of which are from Kartong, and contributes annually to the Village Development Committee (PI: Phillips 2014). Sandele owners Maurice Phillips & Geri Mitchell were instrumental in introducing and educating locals regarding Ecovillage concepts and see themselves as 'facilitators', mobilising the community to take ownership of the Ecovillage development process (PI: Phillips, Mitchell 2014).



**Photo:** Paradise in the Gambia. A cow rest on the beach next to the eco-resort of Sandele. A sharp contrast to the western owned high rise hotels that dominate other coastal areas in the Gambia



## Why did Kartong embrace Ecovillage Concepts?

As is the case with many rural indigenous communities Kartong was plagued with developmental problems including: environmental degradation, deforestation, community disintegration, inflation, cultural heritage loss, litter, violent disputes, loss of local wildlife and rapid population growth, leading to an increasingly volatile village (PI:k1-12). Most problems were attributed to Western-led development strategies enhancing the importance of the monetary system, leading to selfishness and exploitation of the local environment; *"people are seeing things only in terms of economic value rather than their community or spiritual value"* (PI: Arkalo 2014).

Furthermore, villagers were concerned about a lack of mobilization from the community to tackle problems attributed to a *"culture of dependency"* (PI: Phillips 2013), a legacy of colonial rule worsened by years of failed NGO projects (PI:K8, K1 2014). Deep frustration exists regarding NGO's involvement in Kartong: *"they do not know the problems of the natives and often introduce irrelevant and unwanted projects"* (PI:K8 2014). One NGO working with Oyster farmers encouraged locals to take a day off work to learn sustainable ways to farm oysters but failed to show them how; *"they did not even get their feet wet and we lost money from a day's work"* (PI:K11 2014).



The Ecovillage concept was proposed to Kartong to protect local culture, traditions and indigenous knowledge while promoting self-sufficiency, environmental regeneration and community spirit (PI: K8, Arkalo, Mitchell 2014). Thus, while some bottom-up approaches to rural development rely on NGO's (Brett 1993), Kartong is turning to the EVM as a way to both reduce the culture of dependency (that NGO's have helped create) and promote self-sufficiency (PI: K8, Arkalo, Mitchell 2014). It was inspired by recent success in eco-tourism bringing obvious economic benefits and drastically increasing environmental consciousness (PO:K 2014). Some respondents saw Ecovillage development as an extension to eco-tourism; *"our own ideas are very limited and thorough EVM we are exposed to other Ecovillages and ideas"* (PI: Arkalo 2014).

**Photo:** A worker from Sandele explains his interpretation of ecovillage development and the changes he has seen in Kartong resulting from it

## Ecovillage Development

It was not until April 2013, when village leaders met prominent members of GEN, that support for Ecovillage development in Kartong mobilised and culminated in village leaders signing a document announcing their intention to become an Ecovillage. Since then several locals have attended EDE's in Europe and an EDE was even held locally in February 2014, where a significant number of local men and women attended the intensive month long training course. Villagers attending the EDE course have been instrumental in educating the community about Ecovillage concepts and galvanising further support for Ecovillage development.

Inspired by Ecovillage ideas a number of projects have emerged in Kartong including; introduction of a community garden, a community forest, women's groups committed to organic farming, traditional music and dance programs for children, the development of vegetable gardens in the local school, permaculture projects, traditional medicines, environmental community sensitization workshops, village cleaning, tree planting and recycling ( PI:1-12 2014). Additionally the Try-Oyster association, a group of women whose livelihoods derive around farming oysters, have been introducing new sustainable oyster farming methods that limit mangrove deforestation and support mangrove planting programs (PI:K11, PO:K 2014).

Furthermore five people who attended the EDE course are now employed locally. New activities and opportunities arising from Ecovillage development have not only helped halt the youth in the village leaving for cities such as Banjul but have also started bringing people back: *“Two of the youth who had migrated to the urban area have returned to the village and a third is determined to leave his relatively well paid job at an international school to come home this year”* (PI: Mitchell 2015).



**Photo:** Sustainable Oyster farming in Kartong is helping prevent the depletion of precious mangrove forest in the area

## The Emergence of the Gambian Network

Villagers who attended the EDE in Kartong have remained united and formed an organisation known as KEN. KEN have not only been instrumental in mobilising support for Ecovillage concepts in Kartong but have also reached out to other local villages with the intention of forming GEN Gambia, as other villages embrace the ideas. Members of the group have visited and stayed in two local villages where they presented GEN and Ecovillage concepts, helped to build rocket stoves, led permaculture workshops and helped organise village clean ups (PI: Mitchell 2015).

The network is still very much in its infancy and focussing on *“getting things happening on the ground”* (PI: Mitchell 2015). Another EDE has already been planned with participants attending from 7 other local villages, with KEN taking a prominent role in terms of selection and mentoring. This may well prove to be the catalyst for the formal formation of GEN Gambia.

There are also intentions to try and create an in-country GEN ambassador programme supported by international donors to develop people who are well supported by GEN from outside the country to offer informational and promotional support. Geri Mitchell (PI: 2015) believes this could *“create the potential to have paid lobbyists for development within the Gambia, while at the same time assisting embryonic villages with advice and supporting EDEs in-country.”*



**Photo:** Families wait by the riverside in the Ecovillage of Kartong for the ferry to Senegal

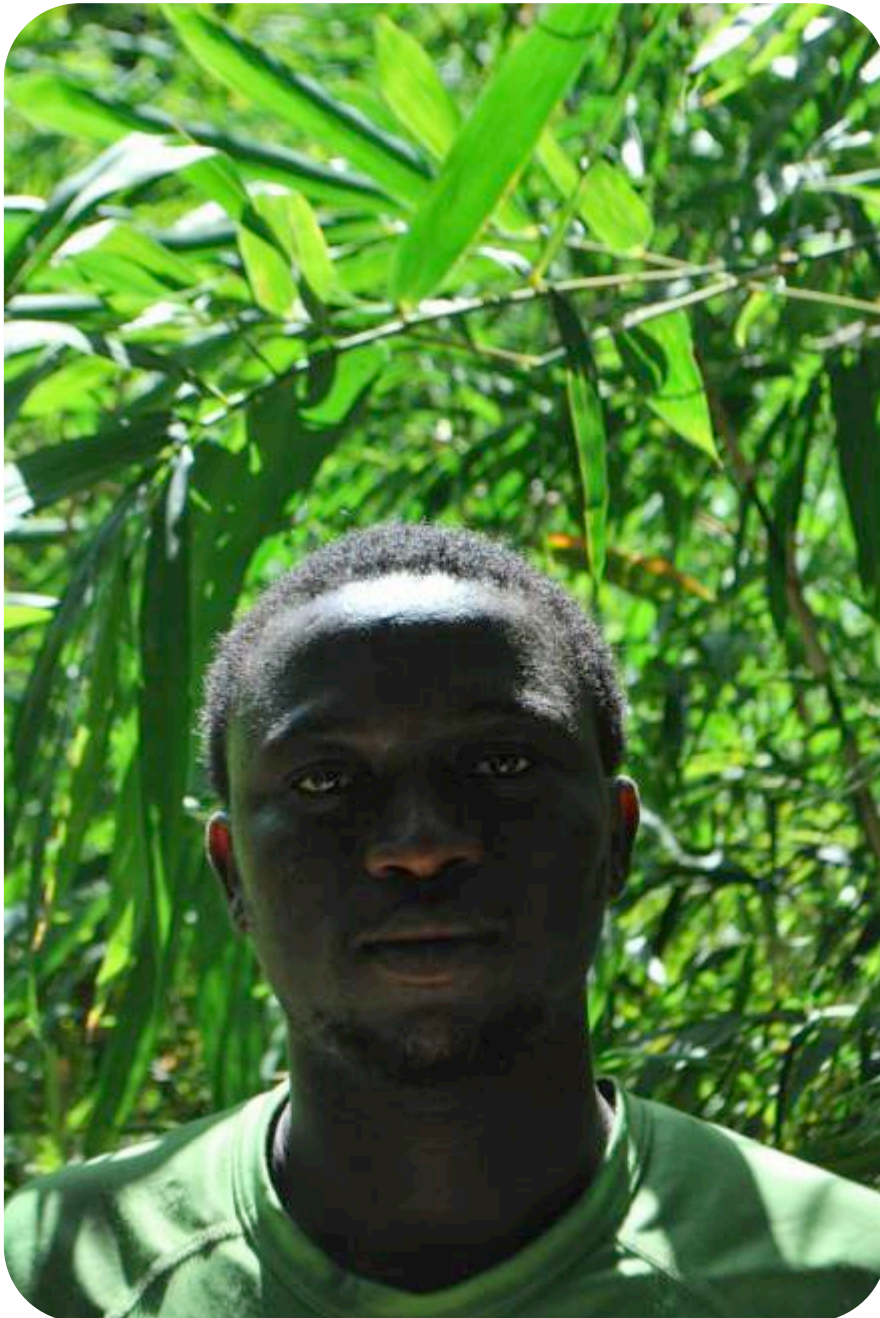


## Insights from the Below

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### Introduction

This section will contain some raw excerpts from people living in Ecovillages in Senegal and The Gambia as well as people who have visited. This is in order to try and convey a picture of what Ecovillage development looks like on the ground in differing situations and to illuminate the different interpretations people have of what it means to be an Ecovillage.



**Photo:** A local environmental activist waits to be interviewed in a community garden he help create in Kartong, the Gambia

## Guede Chantier, Senegal

Guede Chantier (known as 'Guede' to locals) is an Islamic rural farming community of 7,000 inhabitants, located in northern Senegal. Guede adopted Ecovillage status in December 2007 and has since been described as the one of the leading Ecovillages in Africa under GENSEN's program (Pame 2012).

**Problems in Guede-** *"In the old times we used to see trees as living beings but now we see it as money and raw materials. Ecovillage is a way for us to connect deeper with nature again"* (PI: Pam 2015)



**Photo:** Climate change already having serious consequences for villages in rural Senegal. Horses and carts transport people through the arid landscapes of Guede Chantier.

**Interpretation of the ecovillage concept-** *"Ecovillage means taking care of the environment and the community. There are many social benefits to taking care of the environment. For example we have many more trees in the community now since becoming an Ecovillage and now there are more places to talk in shade and find solidarity in each other"* (PI: G5 2014)



**Changes since becoming an Ecovillage-** *“Ecovillage development has increased community spirit and is infectious - if your neighbours are clean and you are not then you are disrespecting yourself and your community” (PI: G11 2014)*



**Photo:** The leader of a women’s group that teaches people how to preserve foods shows off her latest batch of jarred tomatoes

*“The women of the community benefit from education on techniques for processing and preserving fruits and vegetables for storage and for sale at the market for extra income. The association of women has many orchards and has organized a special economic interest group.” (PI: Pam 2015)*

*“There is no doubt that more people are staying in Guede as there are more educational and job opportunities” (PI: Pam 2014)*

*“Even the river is cleaner since Ecovillage development which is very positive for the fisherman because for a while they were only catching garbage not fish!” (PI: G4 2014)*

*“Since we have become an Ecovillage we are seeing many more NGO’s come to the village and teach us organic farming or how to preserve foods. This is having a positive effect on people’s diets and health” (PI: G3 2014)*

*“There is a culture here where people think twice before dropping plastic on the streets and there is a collective appreciation of the plants and trees in the village” (PI: Sow 2014)*

## Ndem, Senegal

Ndem, is idyllic rural community home to about 4500 people who have a reputation of being devotedly spiritual. It has a reputation for being one of the “few examples of successful, rural development in the country” (Simmet 2015, p88). Over 300 people are employed in its artisanal shops which sell fair trade products to stores locally in Senegal and internationally in Europe. The Ecovillage is also closely affiliated with GENSEN.

**Culture & Consciousness in Ndem-** *“What people were living at Ndem was not an endlessly ticking sense of accumulating dollar values, but a rhythm of devotion, which even included an idea of work expressed through forms conceived by us in the West as leisure: chanting, strumming, singing, and drumming.”* (Simmet 2015, p97)

*“Time at Ndem has not taken on the form of an industrial factory, or a standardized 24-hour clock. It operates according to something less classifiable, less exportable: an economy of devotion, of working when work needs to be done regardless of the time it takes. (Simmet 2015, p92)*

**Legacy-** Ndem “has made its reputation without haste.” It has been a project where everyone who has come to the community has left a “little rock,” a far cry from the rapid, “giant projects of the IMF, [or] the World Bank” that try to speed the advance to a single model of modernity. (Simmet 2105, p93)



**Photo:** Rhythm of devotion- A women works away in a field in an Ecovillage in northern Senegal

## Bakombel, Senegal

Bakombel is a rural farming community located around 100km from Dakar and is home to around 550 families. It was one of the first villages to adopt Ecovillage status under the ANEV program and is considered a flagship Ecovillage for ANEV to show visitors what they have achieved.

### Interpretation of the Ecovillage concept-

*“For me Ecovillage is a way to have our own self-sufficiency. For me that is the meaning of Ecovillage because since ANEV came we have more job. Before there were many seasons we did not have job but now we have job all year round and we our working for ourselves. All our profits go directly to our pockets. The government helps us sure but now we sell tomatoes and keep all the money. Today I am here because my husband passed away some days ago - that is why I have no jewellery, no necklace. But usually I am working and would not be where you find me today. We are working all the time now. We can do whatever we want. Before this was not the case.” (PI: M3 2014)*

*“Ecovillage development has changed the life of this remote village significantly. Its residents now have access to street lights and lighting in their homes. There is even a computer room in the school with solar rechargeable laptops that enable both children and adults to connect to the world via internet.” (Joubert 2015)*



**Photo:** An ancient Baobab provides shade for villagers to meet and socialise in Bakombel

### Changes since becoming an Ecovillage-

*“When ANEV first come they ask do you want money to work or what? And we say yes and the government gave us the money and after that the government ask are you able to pay this money back and we said yes. Actually this village we are so hard working that in one year we pay all the money back. We just needed something to start. Once we start with this money we gave each committee/ group in the village some money. We gave some to the women committee and the youth committee and we start working on projects and in one year we pay all the money back. (PI: M4 2014)*



*“One of the first things ANEV bring is the machine to help the women with the millet. The used to be very hard for them and now it is easier.” (PI: M2 2014)*

*“The introduction of computers mean we can now start to learn something about the internet and connect to other people which is something we really like.” (PI: M2 2014)*



*“Before if you wanted to charge your phone you used to have to spend a day to go to another village to get your phone charged which was very time consuming and wasted time we could be doing stuff in our own village.” (PI: M2 2014)*

*“ANEV came back and asked what do you want us to help you in? We would love to have in the village new seeds. They bring seeds of tomatoes and citron and stuff like that. The population start making and growing this stuff.” (PI: M3 2014)*

*“Now we have lots more things we never had before such as rice, tomatoes and oil and much more vegetables. We can cook something different from what we used to eat every day which was lots of peanuts and millet.” (PI: M2 2014)*

**Photo:** A house in Bakombel is full of goats and chickens. Livestock increases have been a big part of the ANEV Ecovillage program.

## Kartong, The Gambia

Kartong is an Islamic/Christian rural community of 4,000 inhabitants in southern Gambia. Primary activities are farming and fishing, with increasing engagement in ecotourism. In April 2013, the village signed a resolution to stating its intention to become an Ecovillage (Gen 2013b). Since then Kartong has even held its own EDE.



**Photo:** A smokehouse in Kartong- Fresh fish arrives to be smoked every morning. The smoked fish is a useful source of income for many in Kartong

**Interpretation of the Ecovillage concept-** *“To me, it means a place where the villagers find a way to take a holistic approach to viewing their village; where they see themselves as part of nature, a growing global movement and share a commitment to regenerate what has been lost in their social networks, culture and environment at the same time as localising economic activities and creating resilience to withstand external shocks” (PI: Mitchell 2015)*



*“Ecovillage concept is nothing new to Africa or to me. But we are losing our values and must return to promoting community solidarity, treating the environment with respect while preserving indigenous ways of living.” (PI:K9)*

*“One word that stands out to me in the EV literature is connectiveness, the idea that people should and will benefit from becoming more connected is very powerful. Conectiveness; the idea that people will become closer between different social groups, age groups, religious groups, closer to the environment and local enterprise” (PI: Phillips)*

**Problems in Kartong-** *“There is a collective lack of confidence - a bit of a legacy of colonial rule that tells Africans that they are not capable of doing things themselves - NGO's have totally contributed to this lack of confidence as community expected to be paid to go to meeting regarding the development of their own village” (PI: Phillips 2014)*

*“The community has become increasingly frustrated with NGO's that come and present their ideas but at the end of the day when they leave they leave the town with the nothing. Ecovillage is a way for us to develop without relying on others” (PI: Arkalo)*

*“There are some local ways of doing things that are far more effective and cheaper than western ways but we are losing these skills because of an increasing obsession with the West” (PI:K6)*

*“Since money has attained greater importance in the community thanks to Western development and the influx of tourism to the Gambia many people are now seeing only the economic value of the trees whereas before they were considered living beings and thus had more respect. People are putting too much emphasis on economic value and not enough on environmental and community value.” (PI: Arkalo)*

**Since Ecovillage Development** *“Before Kartong was an Ecovillage there was not very much environmental awareness in the community but now this has greatly increased. This has now benefited and enlightened the community of the importance of the environment which has now become part of our life” (PI: Arkalo)*

*“Ecovillage development has inspired us to keep developing in a sustainable way that protects the environment, community, traditions, culture and indigenous knowledge and apply it” (PI ARKALO 2014)*



**Photo:** Welcome to the Gambia- A signpost in the Ecovillage of Kartong

## Conclusions & What does the Future hold for Ecovillage Development in Senegal

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### Conclusions

It is clear that both the ANEV and the GENSEN Ecovillage programs are already having considerable positive implications for the lives of many rural Senegalese. However, both organisations are also have weaknesses which are preventing them from achieving the full potential that Ecovillage development possesses.

ANEV are proposing Ecovillage development as a radical new development strategy while GENSEN propose it as a strategy that in many ways is a return to old simpler ways of living that were based around community and had little environmental consequences. Both approaches to development reflect this with GENSEN focusing on the values of traditional and indigenous ways of doing things and ANEV focusing on introducing low-impact modern technologies such as solar panels into its Ecovillages. Clearly there is a room and need for both the appreciation of some of the old way of doing things that have been marginalised by western-led development strategies, while embracing some modern technologies that will have positive effects on the environment and reduce the daily toil of rural dwellers.

A serious weakness of the ANEV program is what is considered by many to be its one dimensional approach of focusing on economic growth. This is leading to misinterpretations of the Ecovillage concept and it missing the opportunity to create a cultural shift by improving social and environmental thinking. Interestingly, this is one of the great strengths of the GENSEN program. GENSEN leaders recognize the negative effect that increasing the importance of monetary systems in rural indigenous communities can have on the environment and social cohesion - as Abdourahamane Tamba (PI: 2014) explains; *“before people used to look at the environment as a living thing with its own spirit and now with the increasing importance of money people are encouraged to look at their natural environment only as something for financial gain. This mentality fosters individualism and leads to environmental degradation”*.

Additionally, the ANEV program also seems to be falling short educationally (reflected by the narrow and limited understanding of the Ecovillage concept in government run villages) while GENSEN (with its well developed holistic philosophy) seems to be very strong in this area and ultimately more successful in shifting cultural attitudes towards social cohesion and environmental protection.

GENSEN has access to a wide range of Ecovillage educational material (through GEN & Gaia Education) while the well-funded and pragmatic ANEV has the funds and the organisational capacity to distribute essential environmentally friendly infrastructure (such as Biodigesters, water towers and solar panels). Ultimately, ANEV would do well to develop an environmental and social philosophy that it can use to educate ecovillagers while GENSEN would increase their effectiveness by learning some of ANEV’s organisational structure and cohesion.

On the one hand ANEV is criticised for being too top-down in nature and thus failing to use participatory methods to cater to the unique set of individual characteristic that exist in rural

situations. Related criticism points to ANEV officials spending too much time in air conditioned offices in Dakar and being out of touch with the people they are trying to help (Simmet 2015). Binta Bass, considered one of the most experienced GENSEN leaders (working in the village of Mdam - one of the only GENSEN Ecovillages to be selected for inclusion in the ANEV program) explains the effect of this on Mdam *“maybe there are some villagers who don’t know the difference [from GEN Senegal]. But I see it. Sometimes, they [ANEV] just bring things that aren’t at all what we asked for. They will take our ideas and just end up deciding something else. It’s not normal!”* (Cited Simmet 2015, p141).

On the other hand GENSEN, with its participatory hands on approach, seems to very strong at the bottom but plagued by problems stemming from the current lack of structure and cohesive leadership at the top that could represent and better serve its network of villages. A more comprehensible base would allow GENSEN officials to meet, submit funding proposals, update their website and other relevant materials and connect to other like minded organisations that could help serve their network of Ecovillages on the ground.

As we can see from the issues highlighted in the previous paragraphs the majority of ANEV’s weaknesses seem to be GENSEN’s strengths and vice versa. Ultimately, the potential for meaningful collaboration between the organisations is considerable and would be most profoundly felt by the villagers they are both trying so ardently to assist. Unfortunately, apart from a few meetings between officials from both parties, communication and collaboration has been practically non-existent. Rather than acknowledging both organisations strengths and finding realistic ways to move forward, both organisations seem to focus on each other’s weaknesses, using them as justifications for the lack of collaboration so far. GENSEN sees ANEV as politically motivated and too-top down while ANEV questions the credibility of the fragmented GENSEN (PI: Joubert 2015). The Global Ecovillage Summit 2014 held in Dakar, Senegal, brought the two parties together offering an opportunity to develop mutual understanding and plant the seeds for closer partnership.



**Photo:** Where it all started- A beach near the fist Ecovillage settlement in Senegal: Yoff

## Global Ecovillage Summit 2014

Senegal was chosen to hold the global summit for the first time as a recognition of the Ecovillage development taking place both at governmental level with ANEV and the at the grassroots with GENSEN. With over 40 nationalities represented at the conference it was truly an international affair. The Senegalese delegation expressed a sense of proudness that the summit was being held in their country. The Gambian delegation were also thrilled their neighbours were chosen to host the prestigious event: *“It was wonderful to have the event happening in Africa and for us, in West Africa, so much the better. As neighbours, we were able to give exposure to the maximum amount of people which meant a great deal the people of Kartong both within the participants and the village as a whole.”* (Mitchell 2015).



**Photo:** A workshop takes place at the Global Ecovillage Summit, Dakar, 2015

Although the conference included a wide range of different presentations, workshops and fieldtrips, the major theme of the conference was to explore opportunities for dramatically ‘scaling up’ Ecovillage concepts and practices to make a significant contribution to addressing global sustainable development challenges (PI: Joubert 2015). The participation of government ministers and ANEV officials provided a platform for GEN to explore opportunities with a national government that has already shown its commitment to Ecovillage development. Consequently, the focus of the summit was dominated by the challenge to bridge the gap between the bottom-up GEN approach and the top-down government approach (Clarke 2015). However, the way in which this was attempted was not welcomed by all. Many GEN participants were left frustrated and confused as more and more



energy was taken up to cater for government: *“The pandering to and distraction of courting and attracting high level government officials and dignitaries felt like we sold out to the old story rather than focusing on building alliances. Entertaining those dignitaries who were willing to join us on terms that honoured our agenda rather than lavish events at a five star hotel would have been more meaningful”* (PI: Mitchell 2015). Meanwhile others saw the energy spent as a worthwhile sacrifice in order to help 'mainstream' an Ecovillage approach for sustainable development and highlight the potential of GEN and Gaia Education’s rich experience around participatory design and grassroots leadership to ANEV and government officials (Clarke 2015).

Furthermore, the summit also facilitated an important connection to the Senegalese pop star Yousson N’Dour who voiced his commitment to the Ecovillage cause and offered to help in any way he could. This would be a huge asset to Ecovillage development in Senegal as his widespread appeal could be invaluable to mobilise support.



**Photo:** The President of GEN, Kosha Joubert ,and other Senegalese dignitaries prepare to make their speeches

Ultimately the summit was the first time those involved in the government program and people involved in GEN work were brought together on a large-scale and this was bound to stir up tensions between two organisations that have such fundamentally different approaches to Ecovillage development. However, since the summit both sides have opened up to each other’s ways of thinking and both appreciate that the visibility gained from the summit will be instrumental in promoting their networks and spreading the Ecovillage ideal (PI: Sall 2015 & PI Pam 2015).



## What Does the Future Hold for Senegalese Ecovillage Development?

The mutual understanding gained from both parties at the summit paved the way for the President of GEN, Kosha Joubert, to visit ANEV for some interesting post-summit discussions. It emerged that ANEV viewed GEN as a more credible partner to collaborate with than GENSEN with its international remit, consultative status in the UN and its permanent base in Findhorn, Scotland (PI: Joubert 2015). These constructive conversations explored a variety of ways GEN and ANEV could collaborate. Some of the major discussion points and outcomes of the talks included:

- 1) **Organising Exchange visits** – GEN to visit ANEV villages and ANEV to visit GEN villages
- 2) **Develop Educational Materials together**- Using the EDE curriculum but adapting it to Senegal and the Global South, Collaboration on GEN's solution Library and publish African version of GEN's 4 Keys (Social, Economy, Ecology and Cultural)
- 3) **EDE's**- Get more people from Senegal to attend EDE's internationally and organise more EDE courses in Senegal
- 4) **Support permanent GEN-Africa office** in Senegal
- 5) **Develop ideas on**- Gender Diversity, Participatory development methods, Capacity building, Pan-Africanism, explore ways to open up channels for grassroots voices to affect national policy.

These discussions have the potential to be an important turning point as ANEV recognise the advantages of closer collaboration for the national program. Clearly GEN has an important bridging role to play in connecting GENSEN to ANEV. However, since these discussions developments have stalled somewhat, partly due to the huge amount of GEN's energy required to prepare for the large GEN +20 Summit taking place in Findhorn, Scotland in July 2015. The President of GEN, Kosha Joubert, (PI:2015) has reaffirmed her commitment to collaborating with the Senegalese government and their national Ecovillage program and recognises that further developments may have to wait till after this Summit - when she and the GEN office will have time to turn intentions and commitments for Senegal into meaningful action. (There are plans in place to find a fluent French speaker to work closely with Kosha on this.)

Successful collaboration between GEN and the national government program could be the catalyst for other African governments to realise the potential that Ecovillage development has to contribute to meeting sustainable development goals while creating resilient communities that take control of their own future - while maintaining precious indigenous knowledge often marginalised by traditional western-led development strategies. With the emergence of a Gambian Ecovillage Network, West Africa has the potential to be a next hotspot for Ecovillage development. It is apparent from internal GEN documents and concept papers that GEN realise the potential for putting into practice their strategy of 'scaling-up' Ecovillage ideals in Africa by working with national governments and international organisations such as the African Union (Clarke 2014 & 2015).

The potential of Ecovillage development in Africa is considerable with committed actors already on the ground and national governments like the Senegalese implementing national programs. The seeds have already been sown. Ultimately, closer collaboration between these actors will be required for the true potential of Ecovillage development to be realised. Clearly GEN has an

important bridging role to play in this process. More effective Ecovillage development in Senegal could be the catalyst for regional African Ecovillage development and drastically contribute to meeting Sustainable Development Goals.



**Photo:** A beautiful ending? The sun sets over the riverside in the Ecovillage of Kartong

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## Interviews with GEN leaders, Village leaders and Others

Reference Number	Name	Gender	Age	Jobs & Organizations	Date
PI: Tamba, M 2014	Mohammed Tamba	Male	Young	GEN Senegal President	2014
PI: Tamba, A 2014	Abdourahamane Tamba	Male	Old	Gen Africa Advisor	2014
PI: Sow 2014	Abdoulay Sow	Male	Middle Aged	Translator in Guede Chantier	2014
PI: Mitchell 2014	Geri Mitchell	Female	Old	Sandele Owner / Eco village facilitator (Gambia)	2014
PI: Phillips 2014	Maurice Phillips	Male	Old	Sandele Owner / Eco village facilitator (Gambia)	2014
PI: Arkalo 2014	Arkalo	Male	Old	Traditional Village Leader of Kartong (Gambia)	2014
PI: Pam 2014	Ousmane Pam	Male	Middle Aged	GEN Africa President / Mayor of Guede Chantier	2014
PI: Joubert 2014	Kosha Joubert	Female	Middle Aged	GEN President	2014
PI: Kone 2015	Adama Kone	Male	Middle Aged	ANEV- Expert in Agroforestry	2015
PI: Sal 2015	Ibrahima Sal	Male	Middle Aged	ANEV- Monitoring & Evaluation	2015
PI: Mitchell 2015	Geri Mitchell	Female	Old	Sandele Owner / Eco village facilitator (Gambia) (Interviewed Twice)	2015
PI: Pam 2015	Ousmane Pam	Male	Middle Aged	GEN Africa President (Interviewed Twice)	2015
PI: Joubert 2015	Kosha Joubert	Female		GEN President (Interviewed Twice)	2015

## Guede Chantier Respondents

Reference Number	Gender	Age	Jobs & Organizations	Interview Duration	Date
G1	Male	Old	Unemployed Organic Farming Teacher	22min	2014
G2	Female	Middle Aged	House wife / Organic Farming Activist	55min	2014
G3	Female	Old	Women's Agricultural Transformation Organization	54min	2014
G4	Male	Young	Student	50 min	2014
G5	Male	Young	Eco Santier Organization / Artist	32min	2014
G6	Male	Old	Fish Farmer	1hr 17min	2014
G7	Female	Middle Aged	Health Centre Worker	1hr 2min	2014
G8	Female	Young	Student / Pastoralist	20 min	2014
G9	Male	Old	Irrigation Worker	1hr	2014
G10	Female	Old	Farmer	43min	2014
G11	Female	Young	House Wife / Clothing trader	26min	2014
G12	Male	Old	Rice Farmer	1hr 4min	2014

## Kartong Respondents

Reference Number	Gender	Age	Jobs & Organizations	Interview Duration	Date
K1	Male	Middle Aged	Eco tourism	30min	2014
K2	Male	Middle Aged	KART Member	40min	2014
K3	Male	Old	Teacher / KART Member	23min	2014
K4	Male	Old	Artist	48min	2014
K5	Male	Old	Former VDC Memeber / Eco tourism	36min	2014
K6	Male	Old	VDC	45min	2014
K7	Female	Young	Bamboo College Member / Student	19min	2014
K8	Male	Young	Law Student Association / Bamboo College Member	58min	2014
K9	Male	Young	Electrician / Yoga Teacher	27min	2014
K10	Male	Middle Aged	Youth Council	44min	2014
K11	Female	Old	Try Oyster Member/ Oyster Farmer	40min	2014
K12	Male	Middle Aged	Teacher	21min	2014

## Bakombel Respondents

Reference Number	Gender	Age	Jobs & Organizations	Interview Duration	Date
M1	Male	Middle Aged	Farmer	59min	2014
M2	Male	Young	Baker	40min	2014
M3	Women	Old	Leader of women's group, Farmer	1hr 5min	2014
M4	Male	Old	Farmer	42min	2014