



GEN Ecovillage Transition Strategy 2015-2020



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GEN'S VISION AND CORE PRINCIPLES

GEN has evolved organically from small beginnings. The network itself was founded in 1995 in order to bring together the rich and diverse tapestry of Ecovillages and intentional communities that had grown independently across the world.

Each community within this network is inspired by the profound belief that their own future, and the world's future are inextricably linked. The central belief and tenet is that respect for the natural environment, respect for each other, and respect for individual and cultural diversity, will bring solidarity and unity across the world. The dynamic integration of the four essential dimensions of sustainability – economic, social, ecological and cultural – is the true characteristic of a community-led, participatory Ecovillage.

Such communities have developed over time an astonishing array of internal democratic governance systems and low impact/high quality lifestyles. They have been proven to successfully empower, sustain and promote truly sustainable ways of living, both in rural and urban settings.

The glue that binds all GEN's communities together, from Colombia to Thailand, from Senegal to India, from Nepal to Canada is the deeply felt sense of shared core Values and a shared Vision of the way all humans should live together on Earth.

Vision: The Global Ecovillage Network envisions a world of empowered citizens and communities, designing and implementing their own pathways to a sustainable future, and building bridges of hope and international solidarity.

Each GEN community has developed over time their own set of core values and principles that determine how each community works, based upon internally agreed systems of justice, equity, governance, respect, loyalty, sharing of resources, spirituality and beliefs. Some of the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in the Global South and communities with the lowest recorded eco-footprints in the Global North are engaged in GEN. Together, they aim to build a world living within its own means, and a world at peace with itself.

Some will say this is a Utopian vision. Some will say that the world of 2015 has no place for such dreamers.

But others, who have lived this Vision, know that humans really can live in a way that not only sustains, but even regenerates the social and natural fabric of life. They are resolved to continue to inspire by their own examples, to provide leadership and to remain the pioneers of sustainable lifestyles. They know that innovation, creativity and the wise use of modern technology and resources, when combined with traditional heritage and wisdom, can massively contribute to addressing global issues of poverty and environmental destruction.

GEN'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND SUCCESS STORIES

GEN is a solution-based organisation. At its heart it believes that that all problems are calling out for solutions, and that communities themselves have the power and energy to drive the change process.

GEN's project database contains over one thousand Ecovillages and Ecovillage Networks, which in turn often consist of many ecovillage projects. In total, it is estimated that GEN reaches out to at least 10,000 thriving villages and intentional communities on 6 of the planet's 7 continents (not in Antarctica !) located in 110 of the UN's 193 nation states.

Some, such as Findhorn in Scotland date from the 1960s, but some are much more recent. Some are genuine international communities – Auroville in India for example consists of 2,000 inhabitants from 40 nations. Some bring together a range of different communities – such as the Bangladesh Association for Sustainability which consists of 42

separate villages working together on local decentralized climate change mitigation measures. Others are primarily focused on organic agricultural practices such as Sekem in Egypt that works with over 80 organic farmers all over Egypt, or Rescope which works with the greening of over 600 schools in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia, and Kenya.

What binds these communities together is their common belief that they are part of one family, with a shared vision and common goals. In a way, GEN's is an extraordinary story – of peoples of vastly different cultures and backgrounds, united in their self-belief and wisdom, ready to sacrifice personal material benefits for the good of others.



THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT AND GEN'S RESPONSE

During GEN's 20 year lifetime as an umbrella organization there has been a growing realisation at Global level that the speed with which world's population is consuming finite natural resources exceeds the world's capacity to regenerate these resources. It is likely that the tipping point has already been reached. Unprecedented human effort will be needed at international level if these trends are to be reversed.

In 2015, two major international events are being planned to attempt to address these. The first, taking place in New York in September, will attempt to identify a set of **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. These will build upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set in 2000. If approved, the UN's SDGs will provide a global agenda for action to address world poverty, hunger, food security, health care, education and a range of other issues. Sustainable practices, wise resource use, equity, and community-led development are at their very core.

The second major conference will be held in Paris in December. This UN meeting will attempt to fix legally binding **UN targets for Carbon emissions**. The scientific underpinning of this work has been provided over recent years by the indefatigable work done by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). It has published a trilogy of reports compiled by thousands of the world's most eminent scientists, giving the most accurate

and up to date account of climate change. The first report, released in September 2013, showed that climate change was "unequivocally" caused by human activity. The second, published in March 2014, warned that the impact of global warming, from extreme weather patterns to reduced food production, posed a grave threat to humanity and could lead to wars and mass migration. The third draft report, published in April 2014 stated that the world must urgently switch to clean, renewable sources of energy.

The science has shown that **community-led responses to climate change** are a necessary and vital part of any whole system change towards resilience. But civil society cannot solve the problem on its own – responses become more effective when closely coordinated with benevolent governmental and corporate support and collaboration. And Global leadership is needed, working within legally binding limits, in order to have any real impact at all.

GEN's practical experience on community-led adaptation and mitigation on climate change is of inestimable value to the world community. No other organisation on the planet can claim such a successful track record in promoting sustainable lifestyles. Yet GEN's work is largely unknown. **For GEN, a key question is: how the Ecovillage approach can be dramatically scaled up, without losing the core value of locally owned, participatory processes?**



In this context, a fascinating development is taking place currently in **Senegal**, where bridges are being built between the Government, civil society and the corporate sector (a similar development is happening in Thailand, but on a much lower scale).

In Senegal, the process started with the creation of a network of 45 Ecovillages as a response to the delivery of educational sustainability programs (forerunners of Ecovillage Design Education), soon after the establishment of GEN in 1995. In 2002 GEN Senegal was established to provide a forum where civil society could showcase best practices (integration of solar cookers, drip irrigation, permaculture design, reforestation programs, etc.) and demonstrate the potential of an Ecovillage approach for sustainable development. The Senegalese government, inspired by the work done on the ground, then established the Senegalese National Agency for Ecovillages, ANEV, positioned within the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development.

Today, Senegal is the first country in the world to create an integrated national **Ecovillage Transition program** dedicated to transitioning 14,000 rural traditional villages to Ecovillages, with financial contributions from the Government, the communities themselves, Japanese aid (JICA), UNDP and the Global Environment Facility. Similar regional programmes seem to be emerging in other Sahelian countries, spurred on by the Senegalese successes, as well as in Thailand and Burma.

It is no surprise that Senegal was chosen to host GEN's first **Global Ecovillage Summit** in December 2014, nor that the Senegalese Prime Minister pledged his Government's solid support for rolling out such Ecovillage Transition programmes across the African continent.

So GEN has a special responsibility in 2015, as it celebrates its 20th birthday, in ensuring that UN global leaders go beyond traditional international rhetoric to ensure that both the SDG and Climate Change conferences become real success stories. This means mobilising serious financial and human resources, changing current mindsets, and heralding a new international era where community-centred development must be in the vanguard of sustainable development programmes.

GEN – THINKING AND ACTING LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY

GEN's approach is always to start at the community level. Start at the grass-roots level, bottom-up. An Ecovillage Transition program never evolves from the replication of a standardised model. The participatory nature of such processes necessitates learning from and working closely with each of the communities involved. Every Ecovillage will be different.

GEN and its daughter organisation, Gaia Education, have developed facilitative and experiential curricula to support the participatory design and implementation process. Each journey of self-empowered local change can be prompted through an **Ecovillage Design Education** or a Permaculture Design Course. A process like the **Transition to Resilience journey** can be used as follow-up to ensure successful implementation.

A combination of such trainings functions as a support system for a local community not only to design their own pathway into the future (crystallised in a **Community Resilience Plan**), but also for them to aim to influence good governance and effective implementation through a bottom-up **“Adaptive Governance Cycle”**.

The Adaptive Governance Cycle starts locally by:

- 1 *Identifying hot-spot communities and key players in the region or country.*

- 2 *Within those communities, facilitating a participatory community and multi-stakeholder appraisal of the context.*

- 3 *1. Recognising the strengths and leverage points in each of the 4 dimensions (ecology, economy, social and cultural) within this community context (see **Ecovillage Guidelines**).*

- 4 *1. On this basis, co-creating a Community Resilience Plan, which describes steps to be taken for community-led sustainable development in each of the 4 dimensions .*

- 5 *Working with local/district authorities to integrate this plan within wider development plans.*

- 6 *Implementing the Community Resilience Plan in order to transition to more sustainable realities in all 4 dimensions (**Ecovillage Transition process**).*

The Adaptive Governance Cycle continues to influence governance on regional and national levels:

- 7 *Drawing lessons learned and disseminating best practice solutions across hot-spot communities/ Ecovillages .*

- 8 *Building multi-stakeholder alliances to work with local and district authorities on Regional Resilience Plans for Communities.*

- 9 *Working with national governments on formulating National Action Resilience Plan for Communities or Ecovillage Transition Programme.*

- 10 *Bringing forward adaptive policy inputs to strengthen sustainable development strategies on a national level.*

In order to support societal transformation there needs to be a combination of bottom-up and top-down processes. What GEN terms the Adaptive Governance Cycle (see Annex Y) enables local solutions and community-led processes to be woven into new tapestries for resilient societies. The society as a whole comes a step closer to establishing a true democracy that trusts in the inherent wisdom and goodwill of their citizens and their willingness to be part of the solution.



GEN
ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE CYCLE



CONCLUSIONS

This short document provides an overview of the work of GEN over the last 20 years and sets out an ambitious new vision for the next 5 years.

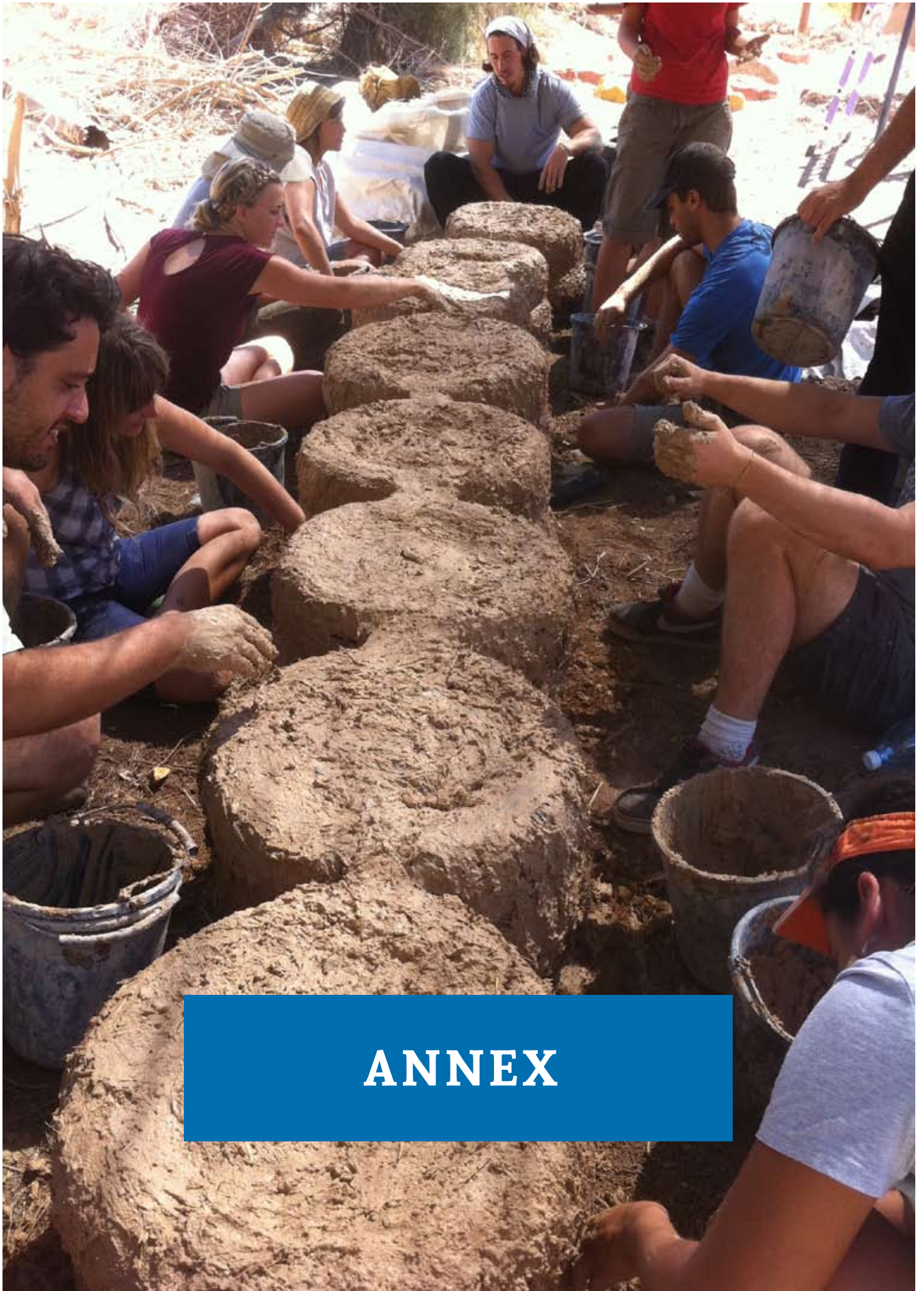
2015 is an important benchmark both for GEN and the international community.

For GEN, the 20th birthday celebrations in Findhorn provide an opportunity to take stock, review progress, and chart a new challenging course to expand, professionalise, and make more visible its work. The GEN World Summit in December 2014 in Dakar, Senegal, with over 40 countries represented, provided some inspirational moments, and an opportunity for the African continent to take world leadership in promoting Eco Village development.

For the international community, 2015 cannot be allowed to fail. It can mark a turning point in reversing current negative global environmental trends – and provide a spring board for developing exciting new technologies and approaches. Or it can ring the death knell on efforts build a new paradigm for sustainable development.

GEN needs to be at the heart of the debate.





ANNEX

WHAT IS AN ECOVILLAGE?

An ecovillage is an intentional or traditional community that is consciously designed through locally owned, participatory processes to regenerate their social, cultural, economic and natural environments.

An ecovillage can develop from the integration of best practices and innovative solutions and the honouring of deep rooted traditional knowledge and local cultures. With ecovillages around the world, we are creating a pool of wisdom for sustainable living on a global scale.

GUIDELINES FOR 'ECOVILLAGE' RECOGNITION

The following are a set of guidelines drafted by the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) to assist in the process of recognition of ecovillages. At the core of an ecovillage lies the intention of its inhabitants to design their own pathway into the future. If you feel that your project or village shares the values and strives to implement these practices below, you might like to consider becoming a member of our global network of mutual support and exchange.

GROWING FROM OUR SHARED VISION AND VALUES, WE - THE PEOPLE – CHOOSE TO:

- *Design our own villages or neighbourhoods and our own lifestyles in community,*
- *Live in harmony with nature,*
- *Become guardians of the nature around us once again,*
- *Celebrate our cultural identity and diversity,*
- *Uphold human rights for all,*
- *Support oneness and solidarity, while helping each individual to find his or her unique way of serving the whole,*
- *Educate, train and empower all to contribute to sustainable living.*



WE STRIVE TO INTEGRATE THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY BY AIMING FOR:

- Best Integral Design Practices

- Create designs in an inclusive and participatory way, making sure that all stakeholders are engaging and owning the process,
- Utilise best design frameworks and practices from the collective wisdom of our network,
- See and strengthen connections between various elements within and between our systems and projects,
- Integrating social, economic, cultural and ecological practices,
- Honour traditional local wisdom while integrating positive change through innovative methods and appropriate technologies.

- Best cultural practices:

- Connect to a higher purpose in life and integrate spiritual practice for personal growth as appropriate,
- Grow awareness about the negative impacts of consumerism, 'growth' and 'modernisation',
- Honour traditions that are good for the people and eradicate practices that harm human dignity,
- Support spiritual and political activism for peace and justice for all,
- Celebrate life through people's arts.

- Best social practices:

- Strengthen community and embrace diversity,
- Use participatory decision making processes,
- Practice conflict facilitation and peace-building skills,
- Recognise and empower leadership of those willing to serve the community,
- Build networks and alliances across all divides.

- Best ecological practices:

- Ensure sustainable resource management of water, land, air, energy,
- Grow organic agriculture and food sovereignty,
- Make use of natural healing methods for humans and animals,
- Further refine natural and traditional building methods,
- Work towards conservation and restoration of ecosystems.

- Best economic practices

- Aim for significant collective ownership of land, water and other resources,
- Strengthen local economy through alternative practices such as community banks, barter systems, local currencies, diverse income streams and social enterprise,
- Work towards economic justice and reconstruct the concept of wealth,
- Engage in ethical and transparent fair trade,
- Develop appropriate legal forms and transparent administration for our organisations.

GEN's MISSION, OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

GEN intends to use the occasion provoked by the 20th Anniversary of its foundation in 1995 to develop a clear Mission and to identify a set of Goals to achieve it. This Mission is set out below:

GEN's MISSION IS:

To expand the network of those individuals and communities who are dedicated to developing and demonstrating sustainability principles and practices in their own lifestyles around the world. It will do this through upgrading its work on advocacy, education, and demonstration programmes in local, national, regional and global forums.

GEN's GOALS ARE:

- 1 *To advance the education of individuals from all walks of life by sharing the experience and best practices gained from the networks of ecovillages and sustainable communities worldwide.*
- 2 *To advance human rights, conflict resolution and reconciliation by empowering local communities globally while promoting a culture of mutual acceptance and respect, effective communications, and cross-cultural outreach.*
- 3 *To advance environmental protection globally by serving as a think tank, incubator, international partner organization and catalyst for projects which expedite the shift to sustainable and resilient lifestyles.*
- 4 *To advance active citizenship and community development by coordinating the activities of regional ecovillage networks and reaching out to wider society and policy makers in order to accelerate the transition to sustainable living.*

GEN's MAIN ACTIVITIES ARE:

- *To provide information, tools, examples and representation to the expanding networks of those dedicated to developing and demonstrating sustainability principles and practices in their lifestyles and communities around the world,*
- *To co-ordinate the activities of a number of regional ecovillage networks around the world,*
- *To serve as an incubator and platform for international projects and initiatives which accelerate the shift to sustainable lifestyles and more resilient societies.*

GEN's STRATEGIC GOALS AND TARGETS FOR 2015-2020 ARE:

- **1 Strengthen the internal relationships of trust and mutual exchange that are the very foundation of GEN, and organizational structures that support these.**
- *1 For monthly Open Forum meetings, and annual surveys to be conducted amongst members of GEN so that a constant process of participative learning and feedback takes place within GEN structures by Dec 2015,*
- *2 For there to be an online public and internal document repository in place so that documents can be accessed by GEN members globally by Dec 2015,*
- *3 For sociocratic principles to be adapted to GEN and a core document of sociocratic guidelines to be published by Dec 2015,*
- *4 For GEN's over-arching global structure to be in place, with coherent policies and practices from the GEN International apex institution to the continental structures in Europe, Asia, Africa, US/Canada and Latin America and the national institutions.*

- 2 Increase the number and visibility of grassroots actions and ecovillage projects that are linked to GEN

- 1 To link up to 20.000 Ecovillages, villages and communities through GEN's regional, thematic and national networks by 2020. (Current status estimated: 10.000)

- 2 5.000 Ecovillage projects to be entered into GEN's project database/interactive maps by 2020. (Current status estimated: 1.000)

- 3 To bring to 160 the number of UN nations which already host at least one Ecovillage by 2020. (Current status estimated: 110)

- 4 For GEN to have a membership of 60 legally registered national Ecovillage networks by 2020.

- 3 Increase the number of individuals who support GEN (e.g. GEN-Ambassadors, Friends of GEN, GEN Volunteers, GEN Staff, etc.)

- 1 For 100 GEN-Ambassadors to be actively engaged worldwide by Dec 2015,

- 2 For 50.000 individual email addresses to receive the GEN-newsletter by 2020. (Current status: 13.000),

- 3 To achieve donations of up to € 500.000 through Friends of GEN and Supportive Members of GEN by 2020.

- 4 Share best practice and showcase the sustainability solutions implemented by ecovillage projects on the ground

- 1 To have 5,000 solutions entered into the GEN Solution Library by 2020 (Current status ?)

- 5 Offer pathways to sustainability (e.g. Ecovillage Transition) that are easy to implement and further develop education and programs that support this

- 1 In collaboration with Gaia Education to further develop GEN curricula and research programs,

- 2 In collaboration with Gaia Education to educate at least 10,000 persons annually in it's GEN Global Education Program around the world by 2020.

- 3 To set up a GEN-Consultancy, bringing together a list of 100 distinguished eco-development experts from all over the world by 2020.

- 6 Create inspirational conferences and communication strategies to promote sustainable lifestyles and resilience worldwide

- 1 For GEN-International and at least 4 of GEN's Regional Networks to host annual Conferences by 2020.

- 2 For GEN's website and communication mechanism to be fully operational by Dec 2015,

- 3 For publicity materials and information about GEN's activities to be readily available to all GEN supporters worldwide.

- 7 Raise the profile of GEN internationally through pro-active political influencing (e.g. governments, AU, EU, UN)

- 1 For GEN to initiate and continuously push agenda issues for global transition to resilience in at least 3 UN organizations, within the European Commission/European Parliament, and in 5 other IGOs of the Global South by 2020.

- 8 Build and strengthen strategic alliances with like-minded governmental and civil society organisations and socially responsible corporations

- 1 For GEN to showcase the logos of at least 50 organisations that are in some form of alliance or partnership with GEN on its international website by 2020.

- 2 For GEN to have built at least 25 alliances with like-minded organisations with signed MOUs or Partnership Agreements by 2020.

- 9 Strengthen the organizational and financial base of GEN in order to adequately fund its activities and staff and expand human resources

- 1 For GEN-International as the global coordinating umbrella to channel € 3 million annually to regional and national networks and their initiatives by 2020.

- 1 For GEN to have 20 full-time staff by 2020.





GEN's Supporters



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The Global Ecovillage Network is a registered charity: SC043796 and has consultative status in the UN-ECOSOC

www.gen.ecovillage.org