

PolicyPennings by Daryll E. Ray & Harwood D. Schaffer

The many dimensions of sustainability as defined by Senegal development official

In defining the term “sustainability,” Col. Demba Ba, Director General of Senegal’s National Ecovillage Agency (ANEV) said that it is, in part, a fight against global warming. Col. Ba was speaking before the Global Ecovillage Summit that was held December 10-14, 2014 in Dakar, Senegal. The Summit was sponsored by the German and Senegalese national governments and organized by the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) International and GEN Africa.

Col. Ba was a part of the official delegation that formally opened the meeting on December 11 at the King Fahd Palace Hotel. In addition to Col. Ba, the delegation included Prime Minister Mohammad Boun Abdallah Dione; Interior Minister Aboulaye Diallo; and the Grand Serigne de Dakar Abdoulaye Matar Diop, Supreme Head of the Lebou Community (the fishing community who were the first settlers of Dakar); and Senior Minister Professor Ndeye Marieme Badiane. Also on the dais were Kosha Joubert, President of GEN and Ousmane Aly Pame, President of GEN Africa.

The Prime Minister was in attendance at the meeting to show his support of the ecovillage movement in Senegal. He told the audience that President Macky Sall, who was unable to attend because of other commitments, is like Mahatma Gandhi in his desire to replace mass production with production of the masses.

Listening to Ba’s presentation were 100 international experts in sustainable farming; permaculture; agroforestry; carbon neutral energy; and community leadership including community, traditional and religious leaders. Also in the audience were 250 Senegalese representing more than 50 ecovillages.

In addition to the fight against global warming, Col. Ba said that sustainability has people at the center of its activities. Sustainability also includes people in community working in ways that reduce pressure on natural resources. He said the ecovillages in Senegal were too numerous to allow him to mention each one by name. ANEV was established in 2008 and currently includes 17,000 ecovillages.

The 2030 goals that ANEV has set include: developing and supporting good governance, increasing food security with ecological principles, addressing global warming, maintaining soil health and increasing biodiversity, and engaging other sectors of society and in these efforts.

Improving food security is at the heart of Senegal’s fight against poverty and hunger. ANEV is working on a sheep improvement program as well as the introduction of chickens into the farm economy. But it is not possible to improve food security without addressing the issue of global warming.

Senegal is facing a sea that is advancing. The

people no longer know when to prepare to plant as the start of the rainy season has become more unpredictable. In addition to the timing, the quantity of rainfall is also more irregular with extreme events of drought and flooding becoming more common.

As Senegal addresses global warming, it is not apologetic about its work in this area. “We are paying for the mess that others have created,” Ba said. “We are saying to the international community, ‘Here is what we are doing.’”

Senegal is engaged in the direct use of solar energy through the provision of solar panels to communities that are beyond the reach of the electrical grid. An important use of the solar panels is the provision of lighting for classrooms. Once installed, the communities will have to take responsibility in the maintenance of these systems. They are also promoting the use of parabolic stoves/ovens that can be used to cook food.

ANEV is also supporting the development of bio-digesters that produce a clean biogas that can be used for cooking and baking. Biogas stoves are cleaner and healthier to use than soot producing wood stoves. The use of these biogas stoves also reduces pressure on wood which is a key natural resource that helps protect the ecosystem. Reducing/eliminating the need to collect wood for cooking also benefits women who are the primary wood gatherers. The digesters use waste organic material to produce the gas while also producing nutrient-rich organic matter that can be used to improve the soil.

One of the principles of ecovillages is to protect and improve the soil. In addition to using organic material from the bio-digesters, communities can plant trees that protect and enrich the soil. Planting of orchard trees increases the variety and quality of fruits available to the diets of community members. The use of trees, ponds and swales can increase the capture of the rain that does fall on the land, increasing biodiversity.

Ba told the audience that the state has scarce resources and cannot address these issues alone. To advance this work, it seeks to engage communities in development in context—the context of each community is different and support communities in their work while identifying technical and financial partners from private enterprise, international agencies, foundations, and non-governmental organizations.

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