

EcoYoff Newsletter

No. 25, June 2008, edited by Marian Zeitlin, Director EcoYoff/GENSEN Living & Learning Center, GEN Senegal and NGO CRESP Senegal. Editorial and updates: 1. University studies in Sustainable Development; 2 Interns and volunteers. 3. Evening classes for housemaids. 4 Peace Corps partnership. 5. Division of CRESP into two organizations. 6. Nutrition and early child development. 7. SEM-Fund Microcredit. 8. Local government websites and computer literacy expansion. 10. How to support us.

From the editor:

Do you remember receiving an EcoYoff Newsletter 3 years ago? Sent by Marian Zeitlin? Last month was the 3rd anniversary of a car accident in the town of Mékhé, in which I broke the windshield face-first, while working with our solar oven project there, with Abdoulaye Toure. I don't want to miss this anniversary to pick up communications with good friends who have worked here or have followed our adventures. From the accident, I didn't re-enter the physical world from a high-flying near-death experience, but from a line of workers walking with tools along the horizon of an Egyptian flood plain, in short still in Exodus. Following a period of classic concussion symptoms, my main sequel from the accident was intense fatigue. In the mean time, however, the Senegal Ecovillage Network (GENSEN), CRESP Senegal, and our study abroad and internship programs have survived, divided and grown into two partner organizations. Much info in this newsletter also is on our website www.gensenegal.org

After 12.5 years based in Senegal, I am eager to spend half my time in the US in Boston, with Tufts, and also Ithaca with Cornell, writing, researching and fund-raising. We are going through a financial short-fall linked to the US\$ and economy (see Section 9). This is delaying me from dividing my time more equally between the US and Senegal

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In this issue Since our last newsletter in May 2005 we have have:

1. -Developed the EcoYoff Living and Learning Center's university programs engaging with ecovillagers with 5 semesters, 5 J-Terms and 2 more October one-month programs in Sustainable Community Development in the Senegal Ecovillage Network, in partnership with the Living Routes study abroad organization (www.livingroutes.org), accrediting more than 300 American and Senegalese students through UMass, Amherst

2. -Hosted numerous wonderful interns and volunteers

3. -Started evening courses in French for about 200 teenaged domestic workers in Yoff.

4. -Entered into a partnership with the US Peace Corps linking GENSEN villages with villages served by Peace Corps Volunteers, with a goal of creating an intervillage market exchange program.

5. -Divided into two organizations, working in partnership, CRESP returning to support Yoff's village association APECSY in its recent renaissance, in the area of urban problems as a part of the ecocities movement, and GENSEN continuing to focus on the Senegal Ecovillage Network, which has expanded to 45 villages.

6. -Continued research and development in positive deviance and other program development in nutrition and early childhood education with the Senegal office of Plan International.

7. -Benefited from and participated in the expansion of the Senegal Ecovillage Microcredit (SEM) Fund (www.sem-fund.org) to more than 150 projects in most of the ecovillages

8. -Expanded our local government website and cascade computer training program to 26 local governments and to a total of more than 3000 persons trained in computer literacy.

9. -Hit a financial wall with the falling dollar and rising prices. Please see section 9 for our invitation to former interns, students and other partners to participate in securing our survival in this crisis and in making our activities more effective.

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1. Development of the EcoYoff Living & Learning Center and Living Routes University Programs in Ecovillages

Our sustainable development program with Living Routes has taken five semesters to perfect its format, which enrolls American and Senegalese students together and spends close to 40% of its time in village development activities, in which village teams become members of the learning family.

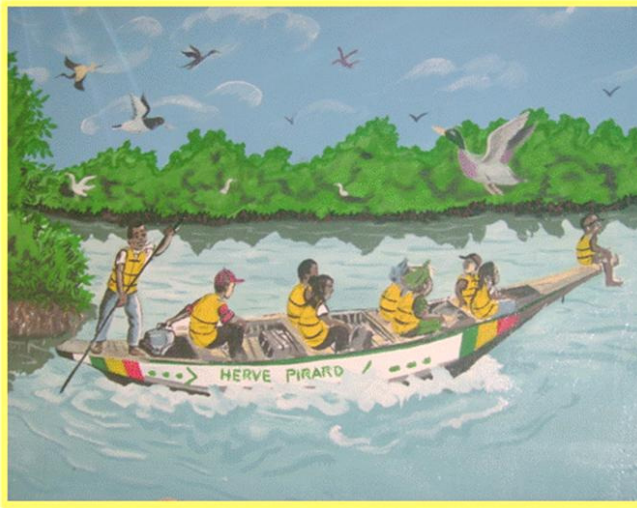
Spring Living Routes Semester family picture in Mbam



The Semester has three components. A sustainable international community development course provides the theoretical and cultural back bone; real sustainable development projects, in which students and villagers learn and apply research, action research, and ecovillage principles to their own interests; and communications and facilitation skills, including language classes and "our space," a time for exploring identity as global citizens in small cross-cultural discussion groups. The development projects fulfill two course requirements, Independent Study and Service Learning. Students visit their study village soon after arrival. Together with villagers they define their learning goals, research and projects, and enter into work relationships and friendships that continue to develop throughout the semester by phone, during a second planning visit in week 8, and during the project period, wks 10 - 13. Students and villagers get to know each other well enough that individual students have the choice of working with other students and villagers in teams or individually with their village counterpart(s). Most of the villages have some French speaking intellectuals. This Spring's projects in the ecovillage of Mbam included:

1. Creating a classic Permaculture garden, with natural insecticides from neem tree leaves in the compost mix.
2. Reforesting mangroves.
3. Mounting a project in which community artists created murals on the walls of the village's ecotourism and community center, and the Living Routes student created ecotourism brochures (the village is adjacent to the Sin Saloum nature preserve)
4. Providing equipment and health education materials in local languages for filtering and purifying drinking water
5. Interning with the health worker in the village health post

- 6. Interning with and assisting the Middle School English teacher
- 7. Constructing a traditional medicine consultation hut and a garden for preserving medicinal plants, and also interesting sponsors and raising donations for a visit in December to plan to continue this project.
- 8. Working on educational materials for artificial insemination, producing hybrid cows yielding 30 liters of milk/day compared to 3 liters from the local breed
- 9. Addressing a teenage pregnancy problem by a sex education course for middle school students, together with their teachers and health personnel
- 10. Working with the villagers to install trash cans, and organize a clean-up system



Part of mural paintings in ecotourism center

One of the most satisfying things about this Spring's program was the consensus of students and villagers that together they had created real value for the future of Mbam.

The final two weeks of the semester included demanding language and sustainable development exams, which are necessary to assure UMass, which accredits the students, that this experiential learning program and its American and Senegalese participants tow the lines of academic rigor

J-Term Courses

Our 3-week January terms, which started in 2004 with Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA), moved to teaching Appreciative Inquiry, and for the past two years and foreseeable future are focused on microcredit, in partnership with SEM. The J-Term, taught in English, usually enrolls more than 40 students (half American, half Senegalese) who go in small teams into the villages to teach and discuss ecovillage concepts using pictorial teaching aids, and work with each village's microcredit associations to better understand the types of loans that will be most beneficial to the village as a whole. The 2008 group went in 10 teams to 18 villages and provided ecovillage discussions and secretarial services to the loan committees for 20 new loans. Student tuitions paid for one loan. Back in Yoff, the students had an advocacy debate with the GENSEN microcredit committee, each arguing for the award of the tuition-sponsored loan to their own team's villages. The committee, made up of ecovillage network members, awarded the loan for poultry raising to the ecovillage of Mboumbaye, near the city of Saint Louis, which they judged most vulnerable because a engineering project connecting waterways has contaminated their agricultural fields with salt water from the ocean.

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2. Interns and Volunteers

In 2005 we hosted 10 nutrition interns from Laval University who did an excellent job of social marketing research with women home-makers. Together they launched our first solar oven project in the town of Mekhe, and produced a cookbook

of Senegalese Solar Oven recipes. Three 2006 summer interns, two junior engineering students from the local Polytechnic, and team leader engineer Melissa Zgola, from Engineers for a Sustainable World (ESW) collected excellent evaluation data for this program, not all of which has yet been analyzed. One of the analyses, however, which we hope to capitalize on later, was carried out by Jeff Leopando from Harvard College in 2007. Jeff succeeded in controlling for substitutions effects, as women used more poluting wood and charcoal cooking fuel to offset the rise in cost of butane. He demonstrated that each well-functioning oven offset an average of 4 MT (metric tons) of CO2 emissions per year. University of Minnesota Intern Hannah Gelder, continued work on CO2 offsetting both for us and for the regional office of the Global Environmental Fund. This solar oven initiative in Meckhe has started a new project phase. The Minister of Science & Technology visited the new oven project last week and approved of the solar-cooked national favorite fish with rice dish "Thieb-u Dien." -it's moving!

Engineer Anne Thebo, also from ESW, worked in 2006 with GENSEN president and hydrologist, Ismael Diallo on water quality of wells in urban Ziguinchor, where the ground water also absorbs human and household wastes. An interesting finding of this study was that the nitrate levels of water in some of these wells would have created potentially fatal problems of methemoglobinemia (blue baby syndrome), had mothers systematically fed their infants with formula made from water taken from the wells with the highest nitrate levels. Near exclusive breast-feeding, however, is sufficient protection from this condition. Older children and adults are able to handle high nitrate levels in water.



Ismael Diallo, Anne Thebo

Fullbright partners

Post-doctoral Fullbright nutrition researcher Jennifer (Vern) Long, then from UCLA, was with us from Fall 2005 to summer 2006. Hoping to collect field data during our NGO Plan Senegal early childhood nutrition and development project, she donated equipment we eventually used to collect it, helped to design the instruments, and later analyzed portions of the data. For reasons beyond our control the project took was unable to get into the field in time for her to make more than one or two preliminary field visits. Vern left her inspiration behind her, contributing greatly to our morale and our capacity to carry out the work when we eventually carried out the data collection in 2007.

3. French language and job skills house maids

Fulbright research fellow Jill Salmon spent the same year working in conditions under our control and set up with CRESP a dynamic educational program for adolescent girls who come from poor villages to earn money as domestic workers. When CRESP and GENSEN divided, this project migrated to the CRESP PDEF/CCF program, where it fits the philosophy of the Christian Children's Fund child-fostering activities by empowering young women among the poorest of the poor. About 200 girls currently attend evening classes.

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4. Partnership with the US Peace Corps

Peace Corps volunteer (PCV), Mary Murphy, took on the challenge of assisting the development of the maids' program. Her primary reason for joining us was to serve as a liason between joint Peace Corps - GENSEN activities developing around the SEM Microcredit fund. Although Mary has had to leave early, we are very fortunate to have had her.

She started links between PCVs and SEM projects and planned a conference to discuss an internal trade network, and the possibility of a variety of training programs.

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5. Division into two organizations: We solved a financial short-fall for CRESP's computer training program in 2006/7 by having CRESP (predominantly the computer training center) separate from GENSEN and join forces with a newly funded computer program within the Christian Children's Fund's Yoff branch office, the PDEF (Programme pour le Développement de l'Enfant et de la Famille). This institutional separation of the former CRESP into GENSEN and the new CRESP restores the urban village focus of the original EcoYoff program, which developed into CRESP Senegal, and also refocuses GENSEN on its rural ecovillages. Serigne Mbaye Diene represented both CRESP and GENSEN in April in the 7th Ecocities Conference in San Francisco.

Serigne directs the new CRESP, which has come into being at a time when the 26 year old village association, APECSY (Association pour la Promotion Social, Economique et Culturelle de Yoff), is undergoing a renaissance,

APECSY's renaissance

Many of you will remember that the Yoff village association, APECSY ("Association pour la Promotion Economique, Culturell et Sociale de Yoff") co-sponsored the 3rd Ecocities and Ecovillages Conference with Ecovillage Ithaca, and that our EcoYoff program started within APECSY as a follow-up to this conference, with the goal of integrating African village wisdom into the global ecological restoration movement. APECSY now has handsome offices in the same building as Yoff's BOSY library, which it has taken under its wing. Next to the President, Serigne Mbaye Diene's, office are offices for Adj. Araame Thiaw, the administrative and financial coordinator, the accountant and the secretarial service. The spacious reconstructed building also has meeting rooms for APECSY's project commissions, the Freye Yoff elders, women's groups, the Students Association and more.

According to Serigne, modern business practices and efficient communications are major themes. Many projects also are taking place. Environmental sanitation is a focus, as is engaging local neighborhood management committees to pay for their own affairs including trash separation and recycling. On a much broader scale, APECSY is taking the leadership to bring the traditional Lebou communities along both the coasts of Cap Vert and to the South to reorganize to protect and invigorate Lebou culture.

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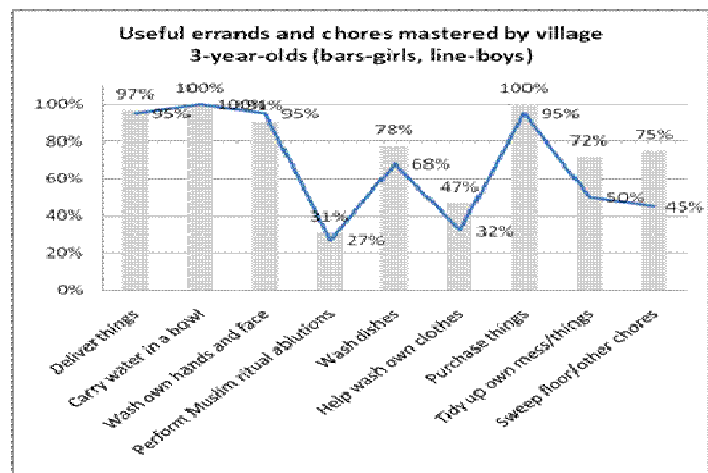
6. Nutrition and Early Child Development

Two of our team, Marian Zeitlin and Oumar Barry, Ph.D. St Petersburg, have been working together through CRESP Senegal in nutrition and child development with a variety of agencies since Marian's arrival in 1996. Since 2006 we have constituted the nutrition/ECD technical research team for a project called PROCAPE (Building Capacity for Early Childhood Education Project) for the Senegal country office of Plan International. We are in the final stages of completing the analysis of data from administering a culturally adapted Bayley III test of infant development as part of a health-nutrition baseline study and analysing the relationships between the children's nutrition, health and development. This study of 180 children in 50 villages shows a very high level of community health coverage and confirms known relationships between stunted growth, anemia and cognitive and language development in the Bayley test sample of 3-year-olds.

What is new is an analysis of the Bayley test items and childrens performance combined with other research applying the method "Designing by Dialogue" including trial of improved practices (TIPS) to parents' developmental

interactions with their children. This fine-grained interactional research with mothers reveals that they consciously teach their toddlers what amounts to a clearly defined oral curriculum that prepares these children from birth to make revenue-generating contributions to subsistence agriculture by the age of six.

Analysis of the Bayley cognitive test demonstrates that its items focus on mastery of educational toys and games, teaching the foundations of mathematical thought, whereas the traditional Senegalese village curriculum between birth-3 years consists of training in rapid physical development followed by mastery of chores, errands and the capacity to accurately follow verbal instructions, without touching upon the concepts tested by the Bayley. Without opportunities to learn the Bayley concepts, the village children do less well on the Bayley items, although children with more toys, and those living closer to urban centers score significantly higher. The following chart shows percentages of village 3-year old girls (columns) and boys (line) able to carry out the chores and errands indicated. How would American 3-year old children score on this test?



We have hopes of continuing to work with Plan Senegal to put in place effective picture and toy libraries, with parent education in early child development, health, nutrition and parent supplied nutritional snacks. This is a program we earlier developed over a 5 year period in Yoff with UNICEF support and Christian Children's Fund support.

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7. The growth of the Senegal Ecovillage Microcredit Fund

The beginning of our microcredit fund was reported in a 2004 newsletter, when an intern from Cornell's Johnson School of Business, John Fay, persuaded his family to lend about \$400, in loans of about \$25 per family, to peanut farmers to buy peanut seeds – literally with "peanuts." The website www.sem-fund.org tells the story of how this brilliant piece of entrepreneurship has grown into a separate venture, with its own US based 501 (c) (3), offering the opportunity to contribute on-line using Paypal. The website also links to SEM's excellent video on YouTube. SEM is unique in that it is managed by representatives of the ecovillages themselves. It also has a near-non-existent default rate on its loans.

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8 Expanding our local government website and cascade computer training program to 26 local governments

From July 2005 to June 2006, the Soros-Foundation-supported Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) funded the NGO CRESP, Senegal, to create municipal websites, a training center and a cyber center, and to carry out computer literacy training in the rural local government unit of Malicounda. This project designed a cascade method that trains large groups of learners as ICT literacy trainers from day 2. Each evening the "trainers" for the next day

learn the parts of the learners' guide they will teach to the rest of the class, supervised and coached by the lead trainer(s). By the end of this 4-week course in Windows, Word, and Excel, the 15 best new « trainers » are ready to teach their own courses, with occasional supervision. They will continue to train other large groups for free until they receive their official teaching certificates. Each paying trainee pays only 10,000-15,000 CFA (\$22-\$33), in tuition, which pays for the full training course. Unemployed and poor students receive scholarships to fill any empty seats.

The funded project year, and 6 month unpaid extension trained a total of 365 people in Windows, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Cybercenter management.

What was new is that the year and a half following the funded project trained another 2,000+ persons outside the Malidounda training facilities and project plan. To achieve this figure:

10 more large cascade training sessions in Thiès and Dakar regions trained between 600 and 700.

72 newly minted trainers negotiated with cybercenters owners in 24 neighborhoods to teach computer and Internet literacy classes in the mornings, when cybercenters are almost empty, training a number of clients estimated at 1440.

Transforming cybercenters into training centers in the morning

Malicounda's 22 villages wind through Senegal's tourist hub on the Petite Cote. While large sections of these villages are underserved, others are rich in cybercenters. A survey of 5 of the villages in Jan. 2008 suggests an average of 3 new trainers per village succeeded in joining cybercenters and teaching one or more ICT classes in the mornings, when most cybercenters earn less than a dollar an hour. Trainers in periurban Sangalkam and Médina Gounas also have succeeded with this strategy. Other program graduates train in ICT literacy in their own cybercenters or as cybercenter managers. This training strategy is highly expansible throughout urban Senegal, and will benefit from open source software.



inactive because more course development is needed. (See ICT cteacher in the above cybercenter in the morning, photo at right).

cybercenters also are good sites for computer maintenance courses.

They train trainers who can then serve their cybercenters. This training, though not included in the OSIWA project, was started by the trainers, but currently is inactive because more course development is needed.

The 10 year old SIP ([www.http://www.sipsenegal.org](http://www.sipsenegal.org))

The Popular Information System (SIP www.sipsenegal.org), which celebrated its 10th birthday in Dec. 2007, is a network of 26 local government websites created by local youth, and cosponsored by local government budgets. Young people collect SIP information from their neighborhoods, and learn to type it up. Young women and men with some university education learn web design software and create their government websites. The existence of the SIP sites has

brought many development partners and projects to their communities. The OSIWA Malicounda project joined Malicounda's young people with web design teams from 5 other new, and 12 previous SIP, in an 86-person training in site design and updating, creating new web pages that won three prizes for the SIP sites in 2007. We have just received new funding from OSIWA for a next phase of expansion, in which local governments will receive their own domain names.

9. Our financial shortfall and efforts to overcome it

In 2001, our CRESP project budgets used a conservative exchange rate of around 727 CFA / US\$. The budgets we submit now use 390 CFA/ US\$. In the meantime, rice prices have doubled. Transport, milk and many other costs have risen similarly. Gas costs about \$8 a gallon.

The tuitions of the American Living Routes program support most our expenses, including six long-term Senegalese staff members who are highly skilled in facilitating and supporting experiential learning and village projects, and who make it possible for the ecovillages to remain "ecovillages" by engaging with students in Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) for pre-literate Senegalese villagers.

This year, Americans have cut spending on study abroad. About 15 American students enrolled for our upcoming September semester, 7 dropped off and only 6 have deposited, as of last week. We can survive through 2008 if the final number drops as low as 4, because staff have agreed to go on half-salary through December if necessary, while we seek other sources of revenue.

We can no longer offer 501 (c (3) tax deductions for donations because CRESP Ithaca terminated their flow-through of tax deductible funds to us, as part of a general policy toward their overseas affiliates, in view of tightening national security laws.

To develop other markets we are preparing 2 courses and a high school tour in summer 2009. We already offer 9 months of courses per year in 2 semesters and one J-Term, but haven't yet filled the summer, which we hope to do by juggling staff placements and making use of the skills of our many graduates, so no one becomes exhausted. One course will be an updated version of the sustainable development 1-month-course we provided to Kalamazoo college over 8 years, before replacing it with a 3-month Living Routes Semester; the second, a four week Gaia Education Ecovillage Design (EDE) course for Senegalese ecovillage intellectuals (of whom there are many). We also are exploring a partnership with the local "University of the Sahel," (<http://www.unis.sn/>) to be able to enroll paying Senegalese students, rather than free students as we do now, and to integrate our semesters into local degree programs.

Two ideas for helping to keep our program alive

1. Send a tax deductible donation to Living Routes, making checks out to Living Routes, saying in your note that your donation is in response to an appeal in the EcoYoff Newsletter. Mail to Living Routes, Inc., 79 S. Pleasant Street #A5, Amherst, MA 01002. Even tiny contributions will help.

2. Volunteer to help us create a "GENSEN Friends" group. I will be registering a 501 (c (3) in the US to support GENSEN, and if possible all African Ecovillage members of the Global Network GEN. Belonging to "GENSEN Friends" (or you name it?) could involve a small membership fee, and we would encourage you to recommend activities and markets to us and to participate in decision making. mzeitlin@refer.sn.

Affiliations : In addition to our relationships with Living Routes and Tropis Environment, Dakar, CRESP Senegal and/or GENSEN are affiliated with the Center for Religion Ethics and Social Policy (CRESP) at Cornell, with the Global Ecovillage Network, (GEN), the UNESCO Chair of the Environment at the University Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD), Dakar, the Senegalese Public Health School (ISED), the ACI Baobab Center and other universities and study abroad programs. Over the years the Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy of Tufts University has sent out this newsletter