



From: Marian Zeitlin
Subject: January 2010 New Year's thank you and update from EREV Institute (formerly EcoYoff and CRESP Senegal)
Date: January 2, 2010

This letter is to thank all of the friends, family, alumni and colleagues who have kindly supported our activities over the past year, as well as over the many years of EREV's evolution into an established education and training institute and community development NGO. January 6, 2010 will be the 14th anniversary of my arrival in Yoff, Senegal, where I have remained thanks to early and continued collaboration with local leaders, members of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and many other partners. Earlier you may have received our EcoYoff Newsletter, from the EcoYoff Living & Learning Center. A car accident in 2005 slowed me down just as our program was picking up speed, preventing me from remaining in regular communication.

I would like to briefly share our current projects as well as some lessons learned over EREV's evolution. All activities reported here have been accomplished through teamwork by dedicated EREV employees, interns, visiting exchange students, and volunteers from Senegal and many of other parts of the globe. The opinions expressed are my own.

Changing names

Our name has changed several times, starting in 1996 at the Third Ecocities and Ecovillages Conference in Yoff with the name EcoYoff and evolving into the NGO CRESP, Senegal. In August 2009, we became Earth Rights EcoVillage Institute (EREV) (www.earthrightsecovillageinstitute.org), in collaboration with our new 501 (c) (3), the Earth Rights Institute, California (www.earthrightsinstiute.org). We made this change after our previous partner, CRESP, Cornell, limited its scope to US domestic projects, requiring us to join forces with another non-profit working overseas. CRESP, Cornell, meanwhile has evolved into an exciting center for transformative action. With Earth Rights we have formalized a relationship based on common goals that dates from the Johannesburg World Summit for Sustainable Development in 2002, following which we worked with the personnel of their Ecovillages in Odi, Nigeria, and in the DRC.

Some Background: Why I came to Senegal

I settled in Senegal (most of the time) after years of teaching international nutrition at Tufts University and working in overseas research and program design, mainly in Africa. I wanted to discover what could be more sustainable than the development landscape I had helped to pave with short term projects and modestly effective infrastructures, I also wished to learn how to integrate my previous work in nutrition into holistic human and community development and environmental protection.

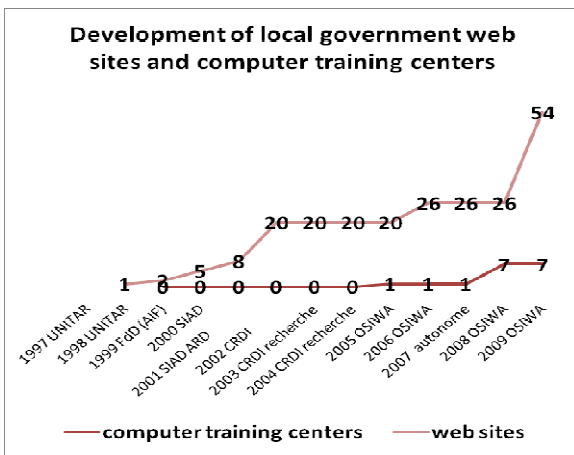
What is EREV Institute?

EREV is a higher education, training, research and program support institute in Dakar with a staff of 15 to 25, depending on current activities. We focus on designing and running programs that become sustainable through links with national service agencies, donors, the private sector, or public-private partnerships. Our current projects and partners include:

1. **Computer literacy and ICT support for local governance.** A 12-year-old computer literacy and website design training initiative in collaboration with Senegal's local governments (collectivités locales - CL), www.earthrightsecovillageinstitute.org/Training/ICTTraining/tabid/368/Default.aspx, with Soros Foundation support through the Open Society Initiative for West Africa and other donor

Young women learning computer maintenance





support (2009 budget: \$90,000). This program is finishing 2009 in official partnership with the Association of Mayors of Senegal (AMS) and the National Association of Rural Councils (ANCR) with 6 new CL computer training centers, each with 20 computers purchased using their own student tuitions and local donations. These centers trained more than 1,000 this year both as trainers in training and as learners in Windows, Word, Excel and Internet, in computer maintenance and in web design. This last group updated 26 and created 33 more municipal/rural council websites (total 54, 10% of Senegal’s CL), making visible their CL planning documents. In our next phase we hope to link these training centers to a licensing agency and to partner with International Communication Volunteers (www.icvolunteers.org) to use cell phones and the Internet to make market prices available to

isolated herders and farmers in CL bordering the desert.

- Integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD)**, a 10-year-old integrated Early Child Development (ECD) program (2009 budget of \$20,000) in which we have partnered with the Christian Children’s Fund (recently renamed ChildFund), Unicef, World Vision, and Plan International. The project aims to improve school readiness by enriching parent-infant and young child interactions through integrating early learning using educational toys and pictures into successful existing child survival, health and nutrition, programs.
- Cross-Cultural University Study Abroad in Sustainable Development and Ecovillage Design Education (EDE)** (www.earthrightsecovillageinstitute.org/Study/tabid/64/Default.aspx), a 10-year-old program, enrolling American and Senegalese students in Spring and Fall Semesters and a January Term program (2009 budget: \$140,000) Since 2004 most of our students have come to us through Living Routes (www.livingroutes.org) which arranges study abroad in ecovillages in many countries, together with US academic accreditation for all our students (including Senegalese) through the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. We also plan a 2010 summer course (www.ieo.ucla.edu/TravelStudy/AfricanStudiesenegal/location.htm) for the University of California at Los Angeles.
- Global Ecovillage Network, Senegal.** In 2002, we cofounded the network of about 30 active, and more aspiring, Senegalese ecovillages (GENSEN) (www.gensenegal.org) with local partners and the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). EREV’s mission to assist ecovillages began with our commitment to GENSEN and now extends to the government’s national network. Our role includes Ecovillage Design Education for semi-literate villagers, working with Gaia Education (www.gaiaeducation.org) GENSEN is an independent association (2009 budget: \$80,000). Last year Senegal’s President Wade created a National Ecovillage Agency (ANEV) with close to USD 30 million already committed from the Global Environment Fund, the Japanese and other bilateral donors. ANEV, which I serve as an advisor, has offered to incorporate the GENSEN ecovillages, making them eligible to receive ANEV support. EREV offers GEN’s and GENSEN’s experience to ANEV.
- SEM, the Senegal Ecovillage Microcredit Fund.** Like GENSEN, SEM is structurally independent of EREV. I mention it here because its excellent work plays a large role in sustaining our ecovillage calling, and I would like to encourage donations to its excellent activities. One of our former interns, John Fay, created SEM in 2004, and it now has numerous developmental loans in more 30 GENSEN ecovillages (See the SEM video at www.sem-fund.org)



Photo from Fall 09 student food processing project in Guédé Chantier

How sustainable are our programs

Except for SEM Microcredit and the new Ecovillage agency, which are sustainably managed by others, and our ECD projects, which operate within the national program of Plan International’s Senegal office, we have a distance to go before our other programs are sustainable. Lots of funders work in computer literacy, but we have not yet accessed the long-term institutional support that the World Bank and other funders provide for education, health and agriculture, etc.

Wonderful faculty and staff run our Educational program, but its dependence on US student tuitions during the current recession leaves us with insufficient operating funds. Spring 2010 will be our lowest attendance ever. Only 4 Americans

were able to pay, although 10 enrolled. Our program qualifies under UNESCO, as Education for Sustainable Development. Gaia Education (www.gaiaeducation.org) also recognized us In 2001 as the “EcoYoff Living & Learning Center.” We serve ecovillage learners, university students, interns and volunteers, combining theory with experiential learning. If current plans bear fruit, our program we will integrate with Senegal’s higher education and rural extension systems, and will offer opportunities to international partners interested in creating global campuses in Senegal.

I am looking for a director for the international initiatives of this program, someone who has lived and worked for a significant period of time in North America or Europe, and who has experience with international funding, technical assistance agencies and higher education. This person would take over my roles in international fundraising, advocacy and foreign university relations, and work closely with our Senegalese leadership to create intercultural programs in which we learn to love our global neighbors as ourselves. We hope to expand our university affiliations in 2010 and to secure support for our computer and academic services by 2012.

Lessons learned

1 Concerning differences between the Senegal’s economy and the global market economy

The economic system here differs fundamentally from the global economy. Working with these differences, rather than against them, can lead to successful programs. The global economy operates on a market system, while traditional Senegalese economic system is grounded in a patronage system. Differences between these two systems can create conflict. As explained below, we have developed a few strategies to address this challenge.

The Sahara Desert and other geographic and environmental conditions kept most of Africa in relative isolation for millennia. In Senegal 70% or more of life-long social security still passes through the economic system known as “redistribution and reciprocity.” In this patronage structure an important man or woman supports a pyramid of helpers and dependents. Although, maybe, 50% of resources pass partially through the market economy, access to jobs and business capital in this market still depends on patronage. One of our student teams interviewed 50 employed and 50 unemployed young people in the streets of Yoff. They first asked: do you currently have a job or a business? If yes, they asked, how did you get it? If no, what prevents you from getting a job or starting a business? Only 1 of the working 50 had applied through a job posting. The rest got their job or money to start a business through family connections. All the non-working said they had no connections to help them.

Reliance on patronage was historically unavoidable. Grandparents of most Senegalese were illiterate and less than half of today’s citizens read and write easily. Businesses in preliterate societies succeed by relying on patronage. Services often are paid in-kind. People may work for food and lodging when young and later inherit a significant portion of the businesses in which they apprentice. Family farms in industrialized countries still resemble this system.

Conflicts between the two systems create feelings of confusion. The market system gives the receiver exclusive ownership of a gift or a bargain. The reciprocity system exchanges gifts and bargains for future favors. The market system expects written contracts to control the destination of funds and goods, even in human crises. The reciprocity system gives priority to human emergencies. There may be accusations of corruption or bad faith. The worst forms of corruption violate both systems, for example, the practice of depositing public funds in private foreign bank accounts.

Ways we adapt to economic differences: We transact almost all business through requests for proposals. Our support requires counterpart investments of energy, commitment and funds according to circumstances and capacities. We also strengthen family obligations that work to everyone’s advantage, as when a Dakar-based formal sector employee volunteers to bring the ecovillage movement and its benefits to his/her home village at his/her own expense.

2. Urban uncertainties and insufficiencies

Yoff was a farming and fishing village, whose lands extended over neighboring communes until 1964, when government appropriation of its land transformed it into a suburb of Dakar. Most city dwellers are living through inconceivable social transitions. Dakar is a safe place. But rapid change creates difficult conditions. Life was egalitarian two generations ago. Growing inequalities in education lead to differences in wealth. City residents now live in communities that are home to

Photo from Fall 09 student project in Guédé Chantier



thousands of kinsmen with scarce resources. Neighborhood networks and large-hearted individuals make heroic efforts to reduce these inequalities and to accommodate and take care of everyone while avoiding jealousies or resentments.

How this affects us: Due to scarcity and differences in economic perceptions, mentioned above, we live with a groundswell of pressure to see if our NGO can respond more generously to staff and community needs. One of our student surveys discovered that the general population thinks that NGOs are wealthy donors.

Ways we adapt to this: We take time to explain realities. “We are not funders. All our money comes from outside donors, and we have to use it according to their rules, which are written in legal documents. If it were up to us, we would give more to everyone. But our donors will stop our money if we do this, and we will have nothing more to offer.” Staff contracts are sensitive and need long discussion. Everyone can understand that we need to pass the accounting requirements of an annual audit, or else we will lose our business. Unfortunately an audit costs about \$6,000 in Senegal.

3. Patience with unknowns



Photo: Fall 09 student school garden project in Guédé Chantier

We know lots of things: top-down programs don't work; participatory action research is more successful; adoption of innovation follows a bell-shaped curve; cultural change accelerates over time. But we don't know when a community will take responsibility for trash disposal, or for maintaining a school demonstration garden, created by pupils, teachers, and university students growing endangered plants.

Innovations that look like failures may not be. They may simply spend a long time on the runway before takeoff. For example, a wastewater recycling plant built with assistance from Jerry and Claudia Weisburd in 2002, was underused for many years, but now is gaining community appreciation and use. Citizen-sponsored trash pickup, a dream 14 years ago, has recently taken off in upscale neighborhoods. Five years ago fresh

vegetables were only in central markets. Now women in most neighborhoods sell fresh vegetables at roadside tables

Ways we adapt to these unknowns: We use standard international-development-style action and operational research. We continuously look to improve our inventory of approaches to participatory development. Approaches we draw on include Positive Deviance, Appreciative Inquiry, Designing by Dialogue, Trials of Improved Practices, short-cycle cascade training, and learning by competencies. We hope to incorporate electronic aids such as wall-projected smart-board tools, SMS for farm to market management. We dream of living at an inflection point in developing learning tools, including video games, for illiterates, capable of raising their knowledge and skills to professional levels...

We follow research on cognitive neuroscience in infant and later learning. I recommend Daniel Coyle's book, The Talent Code: Greatness isn't Born, It's Grown. Here's How. (We love to receive new research information by email)

Ideas for persons interested in giving:

1. Computer literacy: \$100 buys a refurbished, guaranteed, P3 computer for a local government training center
2. Study abroad: American student tuitions support our program. Living Routes asks you kindly to donate for Americans students directly to EREV. They reduce the tuitions of our applicants according to amounts we receive.
3. Early Child Development: (free) references to recent research applying cognitive neuroscience to early learning.
4. Ecovillage networks: volunteers needed and every donation helps, \$25 covers an emergency doctor's visit; \$40, a cell phone. We need to find about \$1,000 to pay for a GENSEN General Assembly
5. SEM-fund: donations through their website are extremely well used. SEM is volunteer-run entirely in the US and also mainly in Senegal by its ecovillage microcredit committee.

We thank you for donating to EREV through the Paypal Icon on (www.earthrightsecovillageinstitute.org). We also would love simply to hear from you. See www.earthrightsecovillageinstitute.org/AboutUs/OurTeam/tabid/109/Default.aspx for our staff email and phone numbers.

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