



Two West African Communities

Senegal

In the village of Rao Peul, Senegal, people are working on the problem of desertification. For decades, trees were cut down and not replaced. With no trees to hold down the soil or add nutrients that allow other plants to grow, the soil started turning to sand about 30 years ago.

The strong Senegalese winds of the north blow the sand and bury people's homes. The sand gets into their food and water. Sometimes it is even hard to breathe. In fact, young people are often responsible for the morning chore of digging the homes out, moving the sand that has blocked their entrances over night.

Together with representatives of an international development organization, community members talked about possible solutions to the problem of the blowing sand and poor soil. They understood that without trees, the land would continue to turn to sand.

The community needed something to keep the soil in place. That's when the people considered planting trees. It's a technique that has worked in other desert areas. But such a plan would not work without everyone's participation. People were needed to help in every stage of the project: preparing the soil; planting the seeds to grow small trees, or seedlings; transplanting the seedlings; and watering them until they could be planted as part of the tree barrier that started to take shape on the side of the village where the wind is strongest. Everyone worked together, including the young people, who were often responsible for planting and caring for the trees.

More than 100,000 trees have been planted by members of the community around the three villages of Rao Peul. While it can't be expected to keep out the sand completely, the wall of trees stops a lot of sand from blowing into the village. The people of Rao Peul have succeeded in their plan because they worked together.

The tree-planting project has also led to the creation of a nursery, where many varieties of trees are grown. People, including children, receive training in the care of trees and plants. The people of Rao Peul have enough trees to sell some to other villages

where people want to build their own tree walls to hold back the desert.

Togo

What a difference a well can make! For the people living in the village of Kadambara in Togo, it means the difference between walking for several hours to retrieve a jug of water, and simply walking a few steps to get a nice, clean cup of water.

Kadambara is like many Togolese villages, where people struggle daily because of a lack of water. Rainfall is unpredictable, sometimes failing to come for many months. When the rain comes, there is often no system to collect it and keep it from becoming polluted. Still, community members need water for so many tasks - washing, cooking and drinking.

Before the well, villagers had to walk to the nearest water source: a river, stream or creek. Sometimes they had to walk for several hours (many kilometres) before they would reach the water. Often women and girls were responsible for this task, carrying water in large pails and tubs on the tops of their heads. But this water was not necessarily safe. It was often contaminated with disease-causing germs.

Villagers had no doubt that finding a reliable, safe water source was a top priority. Together with community workers from an international development agency, they agreed that building a well in the village would be the answer to their needs.

Last year, community members helped dig more than 200 wells in nearly 50 villages in Togo, including Kadambara. One-quarter of these are equipped with hand pumps. This means that water is pumped through pipes rather than retrieved in buckets from the well.

Now people don't have to ration water or carry heavy pails of water long distances. The water available for drinking and cooking is cleaner and safer to drink. Young girls have more time for school and recreation, which are the rights of every child.