

# IMAGINING FUTURE CITIES IN AFRICA: SUSTAINABLE HOUSING SOLUTIONS IN THE SAHEL

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My first year as a Masters in Sustainable Development Practice (MDP) student was highly defined by my engagement in the Development, Security and Climate Change in the Sahel Exchange Program between the University of Florida, Sciences Po and University of Cheikh Anta Diop.

It all started in the Fall of 2014, during the Demography and the Challenge of Social Change in the African Sahel Symposium which explored topics that I was deeply interested and gave me the opportunity to interact with other MDP students from Dakar and Paris. My decision to partner with Désiré Zongo from Sciences Po would begin my year-long collaborative research on urban challenges and sustainable housing in the Sahel.

Countries in the Sahel are some of the most affected by climate change, but resilience building strategies tend to focus on rural areas where people have commonly been identified as being most vulnerable. However, social, economic and environmental changes are causing these same people to migrate towards cities. Our work was particularly interested in seeing how these cities may respond through the housing sector. This is because, according to UN Habitat, the housing sector is the single most efficient sector that can, without extra costs, address climate change mitigation and make environmentally friendly affordable housing strategies opportune and crucial.

Using our cultural backgrounds to our advantage, we initially chose Dakar and Ouagadougou as two cities in the Sahel to focus on and find solutions. Our trip to Paris in March, 2015 allowed us to present our work at Sciences Po and receive critical feedback in order to improve our research. Realizing that more opportunities for sustainable housing would exist for new cities rather than currently existing ones, we



therefore decided to shift our research direction and present our final policy recommendations for future urban areas instead. The use of technology such as video-calling and file-sharing played an important role as we further developed our topic from a distance and wrote our paper.

During our next meeting in Dakar, Senegal in May, 2015 Désiré and I had the opportunity to meet with actors on the ground. We interviewed the architect Jean Charles Tall on sustainable architecture in Senegal and socio-cultural perceptions on the use of natural materials in an era of modernization. We also visited an urban clay construction in Dakar, but most notably the Voute Nubienne office, a natural materials housing construction organization, in Thiès. This visit was very informative on the environmental impact of Nubian vault houses and gave us the opportunity to see first-hand one of the construction models we highlight in our paper. We presented our progress up to that point

at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop and received instrumental comments and questions from a diverse audience of professors, students, and development practitioners and representatives from NGOs and the Senegalese government.

The culmination of our year-long collaboration was my presentation of our final paper at the International Conference on Sustainable Development in New York, in September, 2015. We hope to have our policy brief disseminated in one of the OECD Sahel and West Africa Club publications in which we make tangible recommendations on promoting sustainable housing in urban areas of the Sahel.

*Rugiyatu Kane is a second-year student in the Masters in Sustainable Development Practice Program. Support for this project was provided by the France-Florida Research Institute, the Sahel Research Group, the Center for African Studies, and the UF International Center.*