

**The New York Times** <https://nyti.ms/1t1COgO>

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

# Holding Back the Sahara

## Senegal Helps Plant a Great Green Wall to Fend Off the Desert

By DIANA S. POWERS NOV. 18, 2014

WIDOU THIENGOLY, Senegal — Old people in Widou Thiengoly say they can remember when there were so many trees that you couldn't see the sky.

Now, miles of reddish-brown sand surround this village in northwestern Senegal, dotted with occasional bushes and trees. Dried animal dung is scattered everywhere, but hardly any dried grass is.

Overgrazing and climate change are the major causes of the Sahara's advance, said Gilles Boetsch, an anthropologist who directs a team of French scientists working with Senegalese researchers in the region.

"The local Peul people are herders, often nomadic. But the pressure of the herds on the land has become too great," Mr. Boetsch said in an interview. "The vegetation can't regenerate itself."

Since 2008, however, Senegal has been fighting back against the encroaching desert. Each year it has planted some two million seedling trees along a 545-kilometer, or 340-mile, ribbon of land that is the country's segment of a major pan-African regeneration project, the Great Green Wall.

First proposed in 2005, the program links Senegal and 10 other Saharan states in an alliance to plant a 15 kilometer-wide, 7,100-kilometer-long green belt to fend off the desert.

While many countries have still to start on their sections of the barrier, Senegal has taken the lead, with the creation of a National Agency for the Great Green Wall.

"This semi-arid region is becoming less and less habitable. We want to make it possible for people to continue to live here," Col. Pap Sarr, the agency's technical director, said in an interview here. Colonel Sarr has forged working alliances between Senegalese researchers