

Fall-Newsletter November 2007 : To our Tuvaluan friends

Fall came pretty late in Paris : cold but sunny. Nothing to complain about. Climate change is knocking at doors but still not enough to make us act. IPCC panel and Al Gore got the Nobel Price for Peace. Which peace ? France organized the « Grenelle de l'environnement », lots of hard work for... shallow decisions ; oh yes frenchies turned off their lights for five minutes allowing our nuclear plants to rest but with no consequence on climate change... unfortunately.

Ok let's go back to what Alofa Tuvalu did since the last newsletter. We still did not manage to solve the issue of double language. Did not have much time to even think about it. A few of you, in Tuvalu, received a first draft of our August newsletter. For the ones who did not get it we'll start again from Mid july, when Gilliane got back to Paris.

It took a little while to exchange progress reports, ongoing actions from spring to midsummer had been numerous on both side of the earth. She got there just in time for the traditional mid July fireworks celebration : as usual lots of friends paid a visit and Alofa Tuvalu became expert in punch ! Obviously a longer break would have been welcome but it was nice to take it easy for a week end, making use of the summer sales, gardening and... meeting with friends...

We were about to send our summer newsletter when a severe storm hit Paris but struck only our office ! One mystery leak in the cabinet where the phone lines and other routers are installed cut off all phone and internet connections. For Gilliane who lived thru the last storm which hit the Funafuti telecom tower it sounded like Tuvalu all over again... and we took it with the Tuvaluan philosophy...

Four months have now passed... They were good news and terrible ones. In July, in the biogas field, the first relief was for our report on construction and training to be accepted by Ademe with a good point...

Anare (Sopac) sent Gilliane and Sarah Sikeli's report for them to feed their information. Many exchanged with them, John and Eti about Sikeli's next trip. Finally, after over 4 months waiting for the boat, Sikeli made it to Tuvalu early November, with the pigs for the Agriculture Department. He held a workshop on pigs growing and, in Amatuku, put the gas into distribution. The start of the 2nd digester should happen early next year and we are slowly planning trips dates for Gilles Vaitilingom, Alofa's biodiesel specialist to make the trip too. The usual gang should arrived early january

Receiving the Piggarep documents (a GEF-UN Funding) confirming Alofa Tuvalu's involvement was at the same time another relief (our file had been sent 18 months before) and a headache. To start with it is still incredibly difficult to understand the institutional language. However Sarah and Gilliane filled the documents and everything was sent in due times to Piggarep... Or so we thought... After some drama which we'll explain the ones who are interested, we imagined some kind of conspiracy when the Solomone heading the Piggarep implied that nothing had been received from us, basically putting in question our participation. Our presence was also required in Apia a couple of weeks later... at our expenses ! We all discussed the issue and finally Molipi Tausi got to represent Alofa Tuvalu at the PIGGAREP inception workshop in Apia mid November.

Back in July, Gilliane also exchanged with Loia, Molipi's wife, and Leonie about the IWP and sanitation GEF funding request, and provided a co-financing letter while Sarah was in contact with Kilifi and Matt from the Gef and did the same about their land funding. For both projects, Alofa's biogas is a great partner.

In August, we received 2 unexpected invitations to participate in conferences about Climate refugees at the yearly meetings/thinktanks for the Green Party in Brittany and a few days later for the French Business Confederation, which includes every big french companies to

happen west of Paris..

Apart from our connexions trouble, life went on smoothly at the Alofa Tuvalu's office in Paris... till the evening of August 20th when the phone rung to announce the dreadly news : Mae, Gilliane's grand-daughter, a 2 years young little heart was gone. The tragedy felt like a chopper. Gilliane flew the morning after to New-York where she staid 6 weeks to help Sam, her son and Egon, her grandson cope with the tragedy. Fortunately, American court decided in favor of Sam getting custody of their son against the social services who wanted the kid. The whole family felt « much better » till mid october. Although Investigation showed negligence from the mom and denied her the right to be alone with Egon, she still denies any responsibility and decided to challenge the American Courts by suing Gilliane's son in France. Sordid legal fights are now going on in both US and France. Obviously life will never be the same for Mae's family, relatives and friends but hopefully peace will prevail.

Back in August, at the last minute, Gilliane had to be replaced. Within a few hours, Fanny and Angeline were ready to make the trip for the conference at the Green Party Summer thinktank in the West of France. Alofa Tuvalu also had a presentation booth. The event went well and the girls promoted biogas in Brittany where hundreds of thousands of pig's create a huge problem for waters and soil.

At the last minute too, Eugène Berg, our ex ambassador in Suva replaced Gilliane at the French Business Confederation yearly congress. That's when we got told that Tavau Teii, Tuvaluan Minister for Natural Resources, was on his way and would land a few hours later ! Fanny went to get the Minister at the airport and accompany him along the event and beyond. With her he met major french media and other Alofa Tuvalu's members such as our friends at Ademe, our funder and Eugene of course... The picture of Tavau shooting the Paris scenery from Alofa Tuvalu's roof-terrasse will be in the next exhibition at the Vaiaki Lagi Hotel for sure !

However, to be honest, what Tavau said in front of 3000 businessmen did not please us or the audience much. The event went from an incredible opportunity for Tuvalu to a real fiasco... In the name of Tuvalu, people heard the same request Saufatu asked the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2004 ; that had brought the energy study which itself brought the Amatuku renewable energies center (also partialy financed by the Ademe). The only new thing in Tavau's text which had passed cabinet was a request for a nuclear plant.. When was this added ? We hope it was not triggered by a bad joke thrown by Laure, an Alofian from the daily French newspaper, Libération, who made the trip with Gilliane in 2004, an anti-nuclear militant. Nuclear for such a small country is plainly stupid. This gave an impression of being naively uneducated about the subject. A few other feelings got to the audience, funders and journalists. As there was no acknowledgement of what France has been doing, even if not much, of what Alofa Tuvalu is doing, even if not much, of what Tuvalu is doing, even if not much, many people felt Tuvalu was 1-lacking gratitude, 2-« begging », 3-not doing its bit. An image Tuvalu does not want to give overseas, we're sure. Also, one has to realize that, Alofa Tuvalu's communication about Tuvalu since 2003, helped most of the French people to know about Tuvalu and Alofa's work is at the origin of the invitation, no doubt.

Last but not least, Ademe, our main funder on biomass, was told biomass was not an option for Tuvalu... They felt quite awkward and we don't see them funding a windmill for Niutao.

For the first time in three years fully dedicated to advocate Tuvalu's case and to concretely help the country to decrease its dependency on oil, we felt awful, questioning the GoT's cooperation, wondering where to find the motivation to continue... We did not address the issue with the Government by mail but some of our friends in Tuvalu know of our intention, when we go back, to discuss this issue with all concerned in the GoT : Cabinet and directions, before getting into new projects. Meanwhile we all went on working, as you'll see below but with some kind of sadness.

Gilliane was still in New York when the deadline for the Rolex Awards 2008 was coming to a

close. An award for individuals with a sense of mission. We all had worked on this already, including Sarah and Gilliane while in Funafuti, it still took several days and nights to finalize the draft and the full box of documents, pictures, newspapers clips, dvd's got on time to Switzerland.

Right back from NY, early october, Gilliane was invited to participate to many public events. It started 2 days after she landed, at the Environment Tuesday, a monthly conference where we get to speak regularly. She spent her two first days (and nights) editing exclusive pictures of the biogas construction and workshops to show the audience. There we met with the President of the African Diaspora, a civil society representative at the G8 summits. He had contacted us after seeing tv a documentary about Tuvalu and Alofa on TV. He offered to present Tuvalu's case and ongoing actions at the next G8 session in Japan in July but wanted an official letter before december.. We dont trust we can get that without being able to explain the GoT face to face. So we let it go for the moment.

Then Gilliane was selected by the Women actors for Leading Change project held by Reporters d'Espoirs. This initiative taking place at the International Women's forum in Deauville (Normandy, West of France), aims at enlighting positive actions managed by women. 2 great days and lots of remarkable ladies and possible funders and we have hopes for a big top event in NY next july.

While Gilliane and Fanny were in Deauville, Marianne and Angeline were keeping a booth at the Changeons d'air/Change our Air festival north of Paris. The day after we were part of a debate focused on the so called « Grenelle de l'environnement »... and kept a booth at another forum : the parisian associations forum. That was a week end.

The week end after, early november, was the People Congress in Liège (Belgium). Gilliane had been elected almost a decade ago « delegate to the people's congress » but never attended a meeting. Speaking of Tuvalu to a dozen nationalities was a good opportunity (see blog in french). Coming back we had yet another booth at the international week for solidarity in Paris, and another one at the Water days in Eragny (South of Paris). We also participated in a few debates about water stakes, climate change all around Paris and end of November, Fanny will take the train to Lille (North of France) to speak more about Climate refugees at an european Green party workshop. In her file : an email from Penny speaking about an artificial island. Phew, it's tiring just listing this ! Are you tired yet ?

In between trips and after over a year work, the Tuvaluan fish documentation project was submitted in its final form. It took a few more days with the assistance of Severine (Alofa's treasurer, a water scientist) to finally caught the Total Foundatino's interest. We'll know how much can be funded in december, this give us a little time to get other funders involved. Total also offered for two tuvaluan to be trained at Tenesol, their affiliated solar company in New Caledonia. Training will happen in january. To close this section about funding, after another panic session about the financial participation of the Regional Council, early november everything settled right and co-funding for Alofa' big top events was confirmed ;

In the comic books arena : both Tuvaluan and Portugese versions are now printed. Thanks to Sopac/Piepsap for the Tuvaluan's printing and to Ademe who offered to print 2000 portugese copies for the European Days for Development in Lisbon. The Portugese translation and layout were done by David, a portugese architect met in Tuvalu. He's also preparing an exhibition. Both wersion were done according to our new technical guide to avoid differences in colours or format.. An international press release is ready to be sent. You might get the English version with this new sletter.

On the media side, we were happy to realize than slowly but surely Alofa is entering the international press arena. More International articles these last months than the 2 last years. A long phone interview for a californian magazine, Global intelligencer, another long article published by ipsnews, another one in The independent uk, etc. A very faithful article was published in Fiji Sunday (thanks Meci, Kate, Rex) with Gilliane's face on the A3 cover,

surprisingly big ! The interest from French and European media is well alive too. After a 10mn subject in one of the most popular TV magazine in May (Thalassa), the 52 mn documentary shot in April in Tuvalu aired late august.. Quite good if we forget the mistakes about Tuvalu they refused to correct). Trouble in Paradise aired twice on the French-German cultural channel in October and on Swedish tv the same month... Not to mention Dutch tv with a great report shot last july, or, in Germany, TV Spiegel airing King Tides Alofa shot last year. We have radio shows done and planned too! The last one : Gilliane's interview about economics, recorded during the Women's Forum in Deauville, aired October 25th on France Inter.

For you who got the bravoure of reading this newsletter till the end, please know that we really feel sorry not being able to keep you informed more often but shorter. No internet and no phone for two months and Gilliane's absence made it tough to be as reactive as we wished. The technical handicaps now fixed, we identified one thing that has become time consuming : let's call this « the price of fame ». We have now to deal with hundreds of emails each week from students, tourists, journalists and researchers of all kinds, collectors of all types (including sand samples requests).. Alofa is becoming a de facto information desk, news agency, phone service, general store ... although we dont sell anything. We wish ! It would pay for someone to do this new job. Till now we were doing our best with the hands we had to please everyone. We realized though that whether the answer is quick or late, more than half of the people we give information dont even return a thank you ! The general lack of respect in this world is overwhelming. We decided this week end to send, from now on, an automated answer to all « unknown » requests explaining our reasoning and reminding that we dont want to get away from our goal: to concretely help Tuvalu... OK, Enough talks, let's act.

Thanks to all of you who kept in touch. Your news are important to us !