

COMMUNITY FORESTRY IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE IN THE GAMBIA: ITS PRINCIPLES AND PROSPECTS

BACKGROUND

- **GAMBIA'S FOREST COVER**

- **461,600 Ha** - Total Forest Land Area representing **43%** of the Land Area.
- **11,000 Km²** - Total Land Area rich in Biodiversity (flora and fauna species including **527km²** of water surface of The River Gambia).
- **1.7 Million** - Population estimated at 2008 population and housing census with an annual growth rate of **2.7%**.
- **108 persons per Km²** – Population density.

- **CONTRIBUTION TO GDP**

- **1.0%** Forestry sector Contribution to **GDP**.
- Very important source of livelihood for the population.
- Produces wide range of environmental goods and services.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INITIATIVE

- In the Gambia, rural communities began to participate actively in forest management more than two decades ago. This Programme, which is guided by a set of principles, is being carried out to address the problems of population pressure on forest areas and their resources. The new forest policy of 1995 and the legislation approved in 1998 permit community forest management and community forest ownership. All five administrative regions in the country now practice community forestry. It is considered the key to protection and rational utilization of the remaining degraded forest lands and a means of rejuvenating other scrub lands. Community forestry activities are implemented in accordance with certain institutional arrangements. These are guided by a step – wise process to mutual trust and confidence between the state and the communities.
- The process involves **Three-phased model** consisting 1) a **Start-up Phase**, 2) a **Preliminary Phase** and 3) a **Consolidation/ Ownership Phase**. A village or group of villages can become involved in community forest management by concluding an agreement with the Department of Forestry over any piece of forest land that is not a forest park and that lies within the traditional lands of the village or group of villages. The Participatory Forest Management Unit (PFMU) Programme is implemented in phases. The timing for transfer to community ownership depends largely on the experience and readiness of the community concerned. Phased implementation is useful because it gives partners the chance to learn about each other. The responsibilities transferred to a local community must be commensurate with its technical and managerial capacity for sustainable management of the forest. The process of ownership transfer must therefore include regular training sessions to build community capacity.

BRIEF SUMMARY CONT.

- The management of community forest is based on an approved forest management plan developed by the local management committee with the help of forest field staff. There are two types of plans: the three-year preliminary management plan and the five –year community forest management plan. These correspond to the preliminary and consolidation phases of the CF implementation process. The community’s management performance is evaluated before the end of the preliminary phase. If the evaluation results are positive, the final agreement- the Community Forestry Management Agreement- is signed, leading to the community’s permanent ownership of the forest. During this three-year period, the Forestry Department provides capacity building to the local forest management committee, with training in record – keeping and numeracy skills to enhance its financial management skills.
- The element of minimum external incentives and low input approach from outside donors to the communities make the Programme self – sustainable. The communities use indigenous tools and implements to manage their forest with local initiative, and are supported by technical advice from the Department of Forestry.

BRIEF SUMMARY CONT.

- The expansion of community forestry in the country has given rise to the community – controlled state forest and the establishment of community forestry associations. Some benefits derived from the programme are the rehabilitation of community infrastructure (such as wells, seeds stores and roads), better use of forest and its resources, (in particular, branch wood) and greater appreciation of the value of the forest and its resources. Experience in the Gambia has shown that the challenges of sustainable forest management can be met if the government has the will to empower the rural population by making it owner of the forest.

LESSONS LEARNED

Consciousness and awareness of the rural population

- The implementation of community forestry over the past Twenty (20) years has made the people aware of the socio-economic and environmental consequences of deforestation. Furthermore, the political will shown by the government in giving communities the right to own forests has solidified the new confidence rural people have in it. Also, communities have now adopted, through their participation in community forestry, a system of sustainable use of natural resources.

LESSONS LEARNED CONT.

Institutional initiatives and other socio-economic developments

- The lessons learned by participants in community forestry have allowed the scattered and isolated committees to come together to form associations that reinforce their negotiating power and rationalize their operations. The communities are maintaining these associations to ensure this relationship continues and to serve as a linkage between the communities and government

LESSONS LEARNED CONT.

Sense of ownership of natural resources

- Forest resources require a long gestation period before harvest, and high community input of labour and time should be recognize. Participation in community forestry should only be measured by evaluating the communities' management of the resources over time. The management of the community forest should not be tied to short-term monetary or material compensation but rather to the development of genuine sense of ownership. In the Gambia, the participants' sense of ownership has created a very strong relationship between villagers and their forests. People therefore treat the forest not only as a source of revenue but also as an integral part of their livelihood and their future.
- The programme has had positive effects on forest cover, gender equity, income generation (through commercialization of forest products), governance, capacity building, and promotion of the integrated rural development approach.

POTENTIAL COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

- General Sensitization on Community Forest (CF) Concept
 - The first activity you have to carry out an area where CF is not yet known or where the idea is not yet appreciated.
- Community Forest Identification and demarcation
- Community Forest assessment
 - To get a basic standardized forest description for further monitoring and evaluation
 - To identify management potential options and problems
 - To increase villager's awareness about human impacts on the forest and the need for forest management.
- Elaboration of the Three year management plan and development of one year detailed work plan.
- Training of forest committee and community members on roles and responsibilities
- Re-survey and re-demarcation of the community forest reserve
- Establishing the by laws
 - At the end of the three year implementation plan, community is evaluated for PCFMA certificate award if positive.
- Community Forest Re-assessment
- Development and compilation of 5 years management plan and 1 year successive detailed work plan
- CFMA conclusion and award

WAY FORWARD

The Gambian community forestry and the prospects for other countries

- The Gambian experience of community forestry has been rewarding and encouraging. It has shown that with an appropriate and supportive institutional framework the sustainable management of forest resources by the population can be a reality. Breaking the vicious circle of forest degradation is possible. Many countries have sent visitors to the Gambia in recent years to share the community forestry experience, and this has led to fruitful exchanges and harmonization of policies.
- In conclusion, in the Gambia it is believed that many other countries where a strong political will exists to promote community forestry will surely improve their people's socio-economic status. The Department of Forestry hopes that the participation of many other countries will enable the challenges of sustainable forest management in Africa to be met.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION

THE END