Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Project News: Community-Based Sustainable Dryland Forest Management

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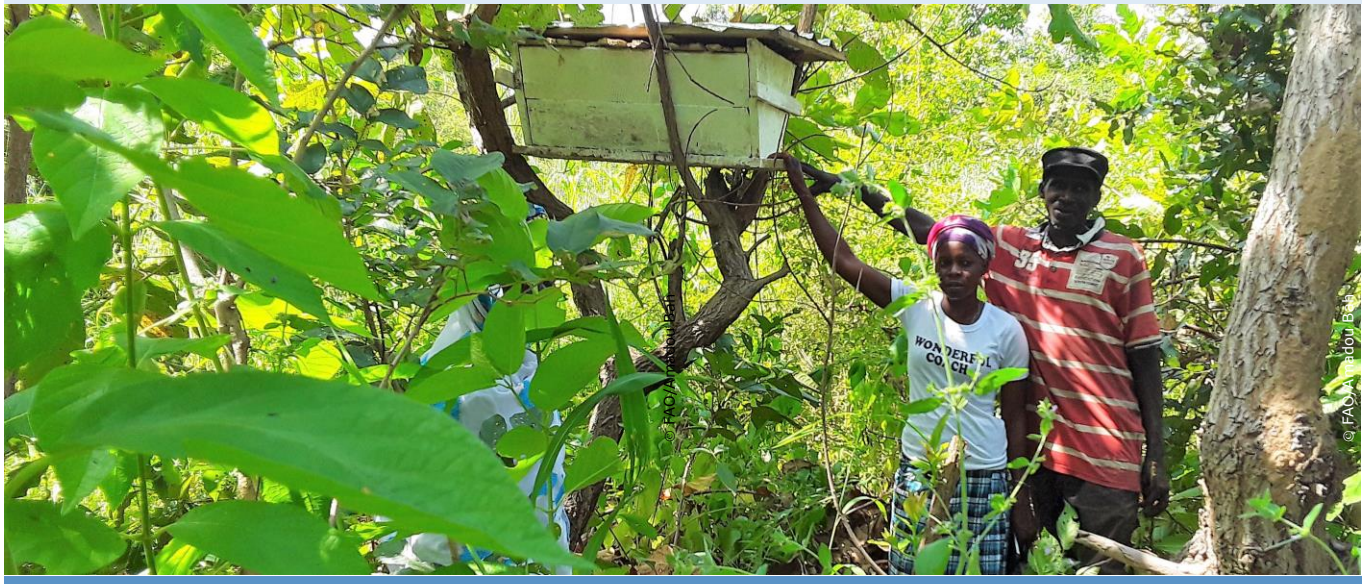


Project Update (January – December 2021)

GCP /GAM/031/GFF

Dryland Forest Management in The Gambia

Forests in the Gambia play a pivotal role in halting desertification, and from a socio-economic perspective, hold great significance to rural livelihoods.

Forest ecosystems provide supporting services (e.g. soil formation and conservation), regulating services (e.g. water and climate regulation), and provisioning services (e.g. food, fuelwood, and medicines). Agricultural and livestock productions account for nearly 30 percent of GDP in the Gambia and employ more than 70 percent of the labour force.

Strong and healthy ecosystem services are therefore important for continued progress in sustainable agricultural and livestock production in the country. Natural resources provide the Gambia with an opportunity to foster human and economic development.

However, due to increasing population pressure, forest fires and unsustainable and uncontrolled resource extraction, forests in the Gambia continue to be degraded.

There have been several initiatives/ programmes implemented in the country to address this situation. However, there are still barriers that prevent addressing the issue effectively.

In 2016, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) approved a 5-year project for the Gambia with the specific objective to reduce forest degradation in the northern part of the

country. Since the beginning of the project, many achievements have been realized in terms of the improvement of the livelihood of local communities and the area of landscape restoration.

In the pages that follow, we highlight some important achievements and testimonies from the ground for the year 2021.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Sixteen forest-based enterprises created in the four intervention regions, and 205 beehives constructed.**

- **Training exercises for enterprises involved in tree nursery management.**
- **Concept of agroforestry introduced in farming systems to 720 farmers through sensitization missions.**
- **The fire management award scheme reactivated to motivate the local population to safeguard their forests against fires**
- **24 000 seedlings of indigenous and exotic tree species distributed among 52 communities.**

Strengthening Sustainable Land Management (SLM) forums

Chief of Jarra Central, Mr. Alagie Demba (Right) and Regional Police Commissioner, LRR, Mr. Lamin Banda (third from left) with a SLM forum members from LRR

In 2021, the project continued its support to the five Sustainable Land Management (SLM) forums created in five administrative regions in order to keep them functional. The roles of the SLM forums among others are to coordinate, monitor and assess the Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) related activities in the regions and raise awareness on those issues to support the implementation of relevant ANR sector policies and legislations.

During the year, the project facilitated eight field-monitoring visits of the SLM forums to various project and programme sites including the project intervention sites to assess levels of implementation. Two hundred members participated in the monitoring visits including farmer-based organizations and local authorities.

"In order to sustain the functioning of the Regional SLM Forums after the project, the Forum members discussed strategies to address sustainability issues," said Musa Samura, a participant. "We benefited from learning the process of developing forum constitution and funding proposals, as well as promoting the inclusion of SLM forum in project designs and development plans of the Area councils"

Capacity Building of Community Forest Core Groups

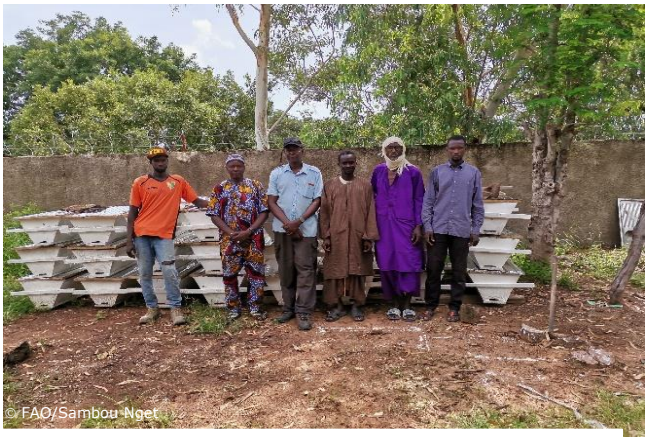
Participants from institutions that constitute the "Community Forest Core Group" received training to enhance their capacity on procedures related to community forests designation in The Gambia. The training sessions included participants from the Department of Forestry, Ministry of Justice, Department of Lands and Survey, and other organizations such as the Natural Resources Consulting (NACO), Gambia Radio and Television Services and the Gambia's Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources. Through the training, participants learnt about the different roles and responsibilities each institution had in the process that designates community forests.

"The training created an enabling environment to support the Department of Forestry (DoF) in facilitating the speedy transfer of tenure of Community Forests to the local communities," said Mr Cherno Gaye, Head of the Participatory Forest Management Unit of the Department of Forestry. "We are happy that this will contribute to the attainment of the policy objectives of handing over 200 000 hectares of forest to communities by 2030."

Improving Livelihood through Forest Enterprises

One of the prime focuses of the project is enhancing the livelihoods of local communities by creating and strengthening "community-based forest enterprises" using the FAO Market Analysis and Development (MA&D) approach. This was introduced in the Gambia in 2000 as part of an incentive mechanism for Community Forestry (CF) and Joint Forest Park Management (JFPM). This approach enhances the livelihoods of local forest managers and promotes forest and environmental protection.

In 2021, the project, through NACO and the NBAG, provided mentoring support for 16 forest-based enterprises in the four intervention regions. During the first mentoring exercise, various enterprises in the country engaged in the construction of beehives through a cash-for-work model. About 205 beehives were constructed and installed by five honey enterprise groups.



Beehives constructed through cash-for-work by honey enterprise groups

"This initiative benefitted us tremendously," Jarra Njie, a beneficiary said. "Before I used to depend only on seasonal agricultural production to generate income but with the introduction of beekeeping in my community and having been trained through the project on value addition to honey products like bee wax, I now make body cream from bee wax which I sell to supplement my income. In 2021 alone, I was able to earn GMD 6 000 about (USD 117) from the sale of this product."

FAO team and stakeholders also visited and supported many villages with apiary management and harvesting of honey. The villages included Jiffarong in LRR, Bassik in NBR, and Chagally Chewdu in URR-N among others. One hundred catcher boxes were also provided to 13 honey enterprise groups to help them improve the baiting of bees and colonization of the beehives.

After the delivery of catcher boxes, NACO in collaboration with NBAG provided mentoring support in the installation of the boxes to the beneficiary communities. The exercise helped build the capacity of the entrepreneurs in bee baiting exercises including dressing catcher boxes with wax and their installation on trees. Both men and women participated in the exercises.

Learning the art of planting and nurturing Trees

Participants learning the tree nursery management

The project conducted training exercises for enterprises involved in tree nursery management. They included lessons on the production of healthy and robust seedlings for subsequent marketing as well as the planting process.

The training sessions were based on a participatory tool called learning by action whereby the sessions were conducted alongside practical demonstrations. This approach was used especially to demonstrate polybag filling and basic nursery management practices. In Yonna village, 30 people, 20 of whom were women, attended the filling of Poly pots. As a result of the training session, entrepreneurs subsequently produced and planted 122 Gmelina, six mahogany, eight citruses, 300 cashew and 1 470 mangoes seedlings. The community forest Committee members and other villagers took care of the sown seeds. An additional 1400 Poly pots were filled and ready to be sown with more mangoes.

In Genjie Wollof village, 40 participants, including 25 women, attended the mentoring sessions. A total of 3677 Poly pots were filled with topsoil and sown with 1188 mangoes, 989 cashew, 300 citrus, 200 coconut and 1000 Gmelina seeds.

"This training was such a refreshing experience," said Ndey Jobe, one of the trainees. "We learnt about how to collect good topsoil for filling the polybags, compost making, seed collection and treatment and how to properly sow the seeds in the polybag. This will help build a better environment for us with plants and trees."

Forest enterprise members learn the essential skills of recordkeeping

The project, through one of its implementing partners, NACO, provided training support on simple recordkeeping for 16 forest resource enterprises. The sessions aimed to improve their literary skills on reporting for accountability and transparency. Eighty participants including 20 from each region participated. They consisted of 36 females and 44 males from 16 community forests and 10 point forest park management areas.

"This training helped us gain a basic understanding of sales receipt books, product utilization from sheet, and invoices or purchase orders. They are good skills that will help me in my business, " Said Isatou Houma, a female participant from CRR North.

Farmers receive lessons on agroforestry

The project in collaboration with an implementing partner, the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI), introduced the concept of agroforestry in farming systems to 720 farmers through sensitization missions. The participants included 240 women.

The event emphasized the importance of agroforestry and the environment to the farmers while participants learnt how trees in agroforestry systems could be used for livestock feed, protection of the soil cover, improvement of soil fertility, as well as food, and other medicinal purposes.

Community sensitization at Kerr Sait Maram in CRR-N

During the farmer identification and selection phase, NARI selected 103 farmers to inculcate best practices of seedling transplanting. About 83 seedlings were handed over to each of the selected farmers adding up to 8549 seedlings. In total, fields belonging to 95 men and 8 women amounting to about 103 hectares of land were transplanted with seedlings.

The selection of the farmers, among others, were based on the size of the land, ownership of the fields, the vulnerability of the land to climate change and equity in numbers among farmer communities.

"These sensitization activities are of tremendous importance," said Lamin J Gassama, the Coordinator of Agroforestry Directorate in NARI. "While it addresses the problems of land degradation or deforestation, we are also achieving a significant milestone towards improving food security, and mitigating the impacts of climate change in the country by promoting and piloting sustainable land management approaches."

Five farmers were consequently identified to enhance coordination and communication with the rest of the farmers.

"I am thankful to FAO and NARI for giving me this valuable learning opportunity," Said Samba Drammeh, a beneficiary farmer in URR, "I can now rest assured that while my farm becomes green and beautiful with trees, we are also now secured of ways and means by which we can improve our income and make a living."

Guiding farmers in transplanting seedlings

Seedlings were transplanted using mostly the method called the "alley cropping design", which is the best in diversifying farm enterprises, protecting the soil as well as increasing overall crop production. This method uses the 20 m X 10 m spacing, meaning there are gaps of 20 metres between rows and 10 meters within plants. The same agroforestry tree species used during the sensitization period were identified and used for the project. These tree species were identified as a result of their diverse benefits such as their ability to restore soil fertility (eg. Leucaena), their effectiveness to improve soil structure, control soil erosion, their ability to serve as windbreaks as well as their use as life fencing, and animal feed. These trees could also be planted within field crops with little or no canopy (eg. Faidherbia Albida).

From the 83 seedlings that were given to each of the selected farmers, about 45 to 60 seedlings were directly transplanted in each of the selected fields, and the rest were set aside to replace weak and dead seedlings.

The state broadcaster, GRTS, covered these agroforestry practices while NARI in collaboration with the Communication Education and Extension Services (CEES) of the Department of Agriculture, supported the development of a documentary film on this topic. The video can be accessed on Youtube.

Award Scheme for Forest fire management

Fire award material presented to the community of Changally Chewdo, URR

As fires continue to be the main cause of forest destruction in the Gambia, the project decided to reactivate the fire management award scheme, which was introduced in CRR by a German forestry project back in 2000. The scheme aims to motivate the local population, particularly those involved in community forestry and Joint Forest Park Management to safeguard their forests against fires,

thereby promoting community participation in the regional forest fire management.

At the end of every fire season, the Department of Forestry in partnership with stakeholders conduct an assessment to take note of those communities who were able to protect their forests against fires in the previous seasons. These communities are then awarded prizes ranging from firefighting materials such as knapsack sprayers, bicycles, cutlasses, rakes, milling machines, and large cooking pots, among others. In 2021, the project in collaboration with the Department of Forestry awarded several communities with various prizes for showing commitment to protecting their forest against fires. Four communities were awarded milling machines which now benefit over 1000 women in the project intervention areas.

"We feel extremely motivated to continue protecting our forest resources as we now understand how important forests are for our environment and our livelihood," said Dado Bah, one of the women from a community that received a coos milling machine as a prize. "We can now use this machine to pound our coos with less time and effort compared to the past when we used our hands to pound the coos in mortars".

Forest restoration

As part of efforts to rehabilitate degraded forest areas and other landscapes, the project, through the Department of Forestry has been supporting landscape restoration through enrichment planting in community forests and Joint Forest Park Management areas.

Over 600 seedlings were distributed to 54 farmers for farmland planting covering an area of about 71 hectares.

"Plants and trees are a source of our lives and we know that we can't live without them. We are excited that we are contributing towards change that will have a lasting impact," said Lamin Dibba, a farmer as he planted a seedling he received.

The CF president at Aljamdu standing by a Ceiba Pendra sapling planted in 2020 in the community forest.

"We are thankful to FAO and the Department of Forest for taking this extremely important and life-saving initiative," he added.

Charcoal Value Chain Assessment:

A charcoal value chain assessment was conducted for the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources. The report was validated and finalized with 60 copies printed out.

This assessment aimed to provide information on the scale and economic value of the charcoal industry in the Gambia, identify the driving forces behind charcoal production, understand the key players, the value chain functions and actors, and provide an insight on existing alternatives to reduce the negative impacts of the industry on the forest sector.

Although there are sound policies and strategies governing the management of forest resources, there is a need for a specific policy to support the charcoal industry.

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