Community-based forest enterprise development in The Gambia

Summary

The Gambia has played a pioneering role in establishing community forestry in Africa since the 1990s. In 2000, it participated in the international Seminar on Market Analysis and Development (MA&D) for Community-based Enterprises Development organized by FAO. During the seminar, the Gambian Forestry Department expressed their interest in introducing FAO’s MA&D methodology into their community forestry initiative. From a 28-month pilot phase to the subsequent 20-month Technical Cooperation Programme, the Forestry Department worked to institutionalize the methodology, in partnership with FAO and local institutions such as the National Consultancy on Forestry Extension Services and Training (NACO). Presently, twenty-six villages are actively employing the MA&D methodology and managing 11 different products which are effectively marketed. Environmental and policy impacts have been also acknowledged – better forest conservation, by stopping illegal logging and setting fire controls, better enforcement of the forest policy for participatory forest management.

The critical factors that have contributed to the success of this intervention were:

- **Enabling policy environment.** In 2001, the government approved the 1st National Forestry Action Plan (2001-2010) including the permanent transfer of ownership rights of forest resources to communities.
- **Ownership and commitment.** The MA&D methodology was formally incorporated into the departmental guidelines and manuals on community forestry.
- **Identification of local/national “champions”**. NACO took on the role of champion at national level for MA&D, and it was particularly proactive at local level with Community Forestry Committees.
- **Use of country systems and processes.** The MA&D methodology strengthened the government’s step-by-step process of transferring ownership rights to communities.
- **Combination of modalities of intervention.** An international seminar, multi-level training, and mentoring, were implemented, supported by development of resource materials in local languages.
- **Empowerment.** There was greater community participation and women’s involvement in the activities, combined with new employment opportunities and increased economic incentives for local forest users and community forest committees.

1. Context

The Gambia is a low-income food-deficit country ranking 155 out of 177 on the United Nations Human Development Index. With a gross national income per capita of USD 290, it is considered among the least developed, low-income food-deficit countries.

Poverty is widespread throughout the country, with a high concentration in rural areas. It is one of the smallest countries in Africa, with a land area of 11,300 km². Forty-three percent of this area is forest, but 78 percent of the forest area is severely degraded.
The consequences of deforestation (and other forms of environmental degradation) and heightened poverty of the rural population were recognized by the Gambian Government in the early 1990s. In response, the government introduced participatory forest management approaches. Specifically, the Community Forestry (CF) concept was established through the Gambian Forestry Act. The basic idea of CF was to transfer ownership rights back to villagers to stimulate an attitude change towards forest protection and to encourage the sustainable utilization of resources through the creation of benefits for the communities.

After testing different approaches towards Forest Management (Forest Park Management and CF, in 1995 the government compiled the experiences and results and formed a national policy: the Gambian Forest Management Concept (GFMC). While the first version of the GFMC defined forest park management basically as a prerogative of the state, the revised GFMC version of 2001 went a step further by demanding the active involvement of the adjacent population in forest park management.

Moreover, in 1996 the National Forest Fund (NFF) was established with the purpose of promoting the protection and sustainable use of forest resources and of promoting community forestry. Through this enabling policy environment, the Forestry Department developed the 1st National Forestry Action Plan (2001-2010) to translate the GFMC into concrete action.

2. Capacity development intervention

In October 2000, the Gambian Government participated in the international Seminar on Market Analysis and Development (MA&D) for Community-based Enterprises Development organized by FAO. During the seminar, the Gambian Forestry Department expressed their interest in introducing FAO’s MA&D methodology into their community forestry initiative. In January 2001, the Community Forestry Programme of the Gambian Forestry Department began implementation of the MA&D methodology in a pilot area of the country’s Western Division.

Encouraged by the results obtained from the pilot, the Forestry Department decided to extend the use of the methodology to three divisions of the country – Western Division (WD), Central River Division (CRD) and Lower River Division (LRD) – and requested a Technical Cooperation Programme from FAO to build the capacities of the Forestry Department personnel and other stakeholders to apply the MA&D methodology for community forest enterprise development.

1 The Fund was financed by the proceeds from the sale of forest products from state forest parks, contributions by local funds, and 50 percent of all fees and royalties received by the central treasury under the Forestry Act.
2 See Annex 1 for the details on the three phases of the MA&D methodology.
3 The Gambian Forestry Department was supported by the Gambian-German Forestry Project (GGFP).
4 The pilot area included 14 villages managing 11 community forest areas.
5 “TCP/GAM/2904- Capacity Building in Community-based Forest Enterprise Development”, operational from February 2003 – October 2004. The cost sustained by FAO was US$ 164,000. The Government contribution and support arrangements estimated value are US$ 60,000. An additional US$ 20,000 was provided by FAO for capacity development of the federated product group JATI/FIF; writing of a case study and audio-visual documentation as additional activities of the TCP.
Box 1. A participatory approach

FAO worked in partnership with the Gambian Forestry Department, which was the designated counterpart agency responsible for the implementation of the project in the three divisional areas (WD, CRD and LRD) and with the National Consultancy on Forestry Extension Services and Training (NACO), a local NGO supporting the Gambian Forestry Department in the implementation of the community forest concept, specifically with regards to extension and training.

Furthermore, most of the training provided to MA&D villages was only feasible through the technical and financial support of various donors and local collaborative partners such as the NGO ‘Fight Against Social and Economic Exclusion (FASE)’, the National Beekeepers’ Association of the Gambia (NBAG) and also the Jamorai Timber and Firewood Federation (JATIFIF) (see box 2). The Gambian-German Forest Project also contributed, together with the Central River Division Forestry Project, by posting junior technical advisers as counterparts to MA&D coordinators / facilitators, financing training workshops and providing logistic support for extension and training.

Furthermore, most MA&D communities benefited from the formation of multi-disciplinary facilitation teams (MDFTs). These were groups of extension workers of various technical departments such as village development, agriculture, livestock, forestry, health or education which advised Village Development Committees on issues related to general village development and facilitated the planning and implementation of village based development programmes and projects.

The capacity development intervention was built around the following main modalities: (i) multi-level training on the MA&D methodology; (ii) sensitization meetings and workshops; and (iii) development of training materials in local languages.

2.1 Multi-level training, sensitization meetings and workshops

The National Project Coordinator of the Forestry Department, who coordinated a team of national trainers, worked closely with FAO technical officers. The national team consisted of staff from the Community Forest Unit of the Forestry Department and NACO. Through a project inception workshop, training needs at national level for Community-based Enterprise Development were reviewed and training of trainers conducted using the Market Analysis and Development approach. The training focused on the following areas:

- using participatory methods and tools for selecting viable products for the community based enterprises;
- conducting analysis based on the four areas of Enterprise Development (Social/Institutional, Science/Technology, Resource/Environment, Market/Economy);
- conducting surveys (including resource and market surveys) on forest products at district and divisional levels;
- creating interest groups for selected products;
- developing enterprise development plans;
- monitoring the implementation of enterprise plans; and
- linking with appropriate sources of enterprise development support.

NACO is the national NGO which worked with the Forestry Department as the primary facilitator during the piloting of the MA&D methodology in the Western Division and was responsible for the organization and implementation of the project at local level.
Subsequently, the team of national trainers conducted a series of *in-depth training workshops on Community-based Enterprise Development for extension staff and field facilitators* (from Forestry Department and cooperating NGOs) in the three country divisional areas. In addition, village sensitizations meetings were held to promote the approach. Finally, the extension staff and field facilitators trained and guided the Community Forestry Committees in the actual implementation of community enterprise development activities.

### 2.2 Development of training materials

FAO, in collaboration with its partners,\(^7\) developed a package of materials to support the application of the MA&D approach. A **brochure** with an overview of MA&D and its benefits, and a **manual** presented in a briefing with a **map of the process** and a **series of booklets** were published in 2000. In 2004, the **Field Facilitators Guidelines** were made available to assist field facilitators in implementing all the MA&D steps described in the manual.

Many of the MA&D tools have been adapted from participatory rural appraisal guides or entrepreneurship development manuals. In this respect, MA&D is the result of sharing experiences and best practices among practitioners in many countries who have used participatory process with communities to plan enterprises. **It is a continuously evolving methodology, as facilitators continually look for ways to adapt or improve tools to fit their particular situation and products.**

Both the manual and the field facilitators guidelines assume that facilitators have existing knowledge and expertise in the use of participatory assessment tools, since they are required to adapt these tools considerably.

In order for community-based entrepreneurs and facilitators to carry out the MA&D approach independently, the FAO manuals, field guidelines and form sheets were adapted to the national context, and the materials were simplified materials by:

- field-testing materials to gauge how easy they were for local communities to understand and modifying them accordingly; and
- translating training materials into local languages (Mandinka, Wolof and Fula) for village training.

Staff of the Forestry Department and NACO played a crucial role in this adaptation process. Additional efforts were also made to make the materials as visual as possible so that illiterate farmers could participate fully in the training sessions.

### 3. Results

A considerable amount of time was spent in training on the application of the MA&D approach at institutional and at community level (Forestry Department staff, NGOs staff, 

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\(^7\) FAO’s partners are: the Regional Community Forestry Training Center, the World Conservation Unit (IUCN), Netherlands Development Assistance (NEDA), the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV).
interest group representatives, forest extension staff and Community Forest Committee members). The national team made up of one Senior Forest Officer (Forestry Department), the NACO head and one Junior Technical Advisor from the GGFP were trained in participatory forest management and effective service delivery. They were responsible for training forest extension staff, with an FAO expert as mentor. Forty forest extensionists and six NACO members were trained on the MA&D approach, including issues such as selection of potential forest products for enterprise activities, management of future enterprises and organizational issues. National trainers also provided technical backstopping and mentoring support to the field staff for the implementation of the MA&D approach at village level. Two general sensitization meetings on the MA&D methodology were held for Forestry Department staff and collaborating institutions.

As a result of the MA&D trainings at village level, 72 enterprise development plans have been effectively implemented and corresponding enterprises established, catalyzing many village development activities such as village electrification, school and road construction, village water projects and the provision of soft loans to community members. By the end of 2004, 484 members of enterprise interest groups\(^8\) were engaged in MA&D activities.

**Box 2. Developing local capacities: small entrepreneurs’ federated groups in The Gambia**

**Jamorai Timber and Firewood Federation (JATIFIF)**

In 2003, representatives from 11 interest groups in communities surrounding Kafuta village held a number of workshops using the MA&D approach. During the pilot testing of the timber and fuelwood enterprises, serious technological and market constraints were identified, such as the high cost of renting saws, high transportation costs etc. At the same time, the communities had neither access to, nor training in, the operation of such equipment as chainsaws and sawmills. Thus, entrepreneurs from the capital town came with their chainsaws and labour, thus depriving communities of income.

During the MA&D workshops, the interest groups realized that if they had no power to overcome this constraint alone, they might resolve it by joining forces. The 11 communities decided to form a federated group called JATIFIF. They built their capacity through technical and group management training, setting fixed prices, sharing transport costs and market information and monitoring their resource base. The interest groups, which are now empowered by having more responsibilities, have rented chainsaws and are paying the labour costs themselves, negotiating with private sawmills and sharing out the work within the community. The price increase has had no effect on the high demand for timber, as contractors are still making a large profit. This new arrangement has almost doubled the interest groups’ profit and led to the creation of many additional jobs in the community.

Through the federation, members of JATIFIF have created a number of links to other institutions, such as FAO. In November 2004, JATIFIF met with representatives of FAO to discuss a Tele-food proposal to further increase its members’ technical capacity. JATIFIF had plans to purchase a number of chainsaws, which would be operated and paid for by the affiliated interest groups. It has already trained members on basic operation and maintenance skills, and succeeded in cutting out the intermediaries completely, taking on the additional responsibilities of hiring trucks and transporting

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\(^8\) Interest groups/enterprises: They are the business arms of community forest committees or co-management partner. The selection of interest group members was entirely left to the community, which was advised to seek people with: experience in managing small enterprises or with a strong business background; a sufficiently high level of education, experience in village affairs or a respected position within the community; specific technical knowledge in utilizing forest products; and strong motivation or experience in a related field.
At policy level, a number of goals stated in the 1998 Forest Act have been achieved regarding the sustainable utilization of forest resources. Forestry Department field staff are enforcing laws more vigilantly; constraints concerning policy issues have been revealed and proposals for solutions have been established.

At departmental/institutional level, the MA&D approach was incorporated into the Community Forestry Implementation Guideline and Field Manual of the Gambian government. Furthermore, in order to instruct future field facilitators and extensionists, the MA&D methodology was included in the curricula of the Kafuta School for Forestry in June 2004.

At community level, in terms of marketed products, in the 26 villages actively employing the MA&D methodology, 11 products are being marketed effectively: fuel wood, logs/timber, honey, palm-oil, handicrafts from Rhun palm-based products, Rhun palm splits, ecotourism (forest walks), tree nurseries, kembo posts.

At individual level, more than 150 representatives of the various community-based forest enterprises acquired skills in:

- marketing (e.g. enterprise literacy, product development, budgeting and record keeping);
- sustainable resource management (e.g. resource assessment and identification of mechanisms for controlled resource use);
- social development (e.g. group formation and strengthening, and conflict resolution); and
- specialized technical skills in harvesting and processing of forest products (e.g. honey production, chainsaw/sawmill operation, furniture making).

4. Critical factors leading to successful capacity development intervention(s)

The critical factors that have contributed to the success in institutionalizing the MA&D methodology can be summarized in the following points:

*Enabling policy environment*

As previously mentioned, The Gambia has played a pioneering role in establishing community forestry in Africa since the 1990s. The Government’s long exposure to participatory forestry and its willingness to learn from internal and external experiences in this area reflects its openness to change.

*Ownership and commitment*

Its commitment to decentralizing the management of forest resources was clearly stated by the approval of the Local Government Act in 2002, which outlined the responsibilities of regional institutions and envisaged “the promotion of community participation in micro project planning, implementation and management of local resources”.

The sustained effort of the Forestry Department to implement the policy framework and to institutionalize the MA&D methodology by including it in the department guidelines and manuals on community forestry was critical.

*Identification of local/national “champions”*
Participatory forestry and enterprise development normally requires a multisectoral approach, as single institutions may not have all the capacities needed to implement it. To overcome this, the Forestry Department, in partnership with FAO, contracted NACO to support the project. This national “champion” proved to be particularly competent and proactive, especially in adapting training materials, organizing sensitization workshops, and training field facilitators and Community Forestry Committees. Its involvement was key to the success of the project.

Use of country systems and processes
FAO’s capacity development support built on the country’s internal processes of change and adopted modalities and approaches that reinforced what already existed. For example, the government’s process of transferring ownership rights to participating communities was based on a step-by-step approach organized in three phases. The MA&D process was similarly articulated in three phases\(^9\) and could leverage capacities from that basis.

Combination of modalities of intervention
FAO’s intervention was made through different modalities, from the International Seminar on MA&D to multi-level learning-by-doing training, workshops and the development of training materials in local languages. These different modalities played an important role in enhancing capacities of institutions as well as of individuals. The multisectoral approach adopted in the implementation of MA&D, involving local NGOs and local associations, resulted in enhanced partnerships among various institutions, from village-based entrepreneurs to NGOs working at the administrative level.

Empowerment
The changes in communities’ capabilities, i.e. 26 villages are actively employing the MA&D methodology and managing 11 different effectively marketed products, were critical for enhancing ownership with respect to forest protection and enterprise development. Many communities are now taking active measures to better maintain their forests, for example by setting firebreaks and patrolling to prevent illegal felling together. The interest groups created around the selected products have a strong sense of ownership of the enterprise development plan, and therefore play a key role in developing it, with extension agents only facilitating the process and providing assistance when necessary. This has contributed to enhancing self-confidence and empowerment, and promoted dialogue and collaboration between the forestry service and local communities.

5. Further reading and information


\(^9\) For details, see Annex 1.

The MA&D is based on a preliminary planning phase and the three following implementing phases:

**Phase 1: Assess the Existing Situation**

Phase one identifies potential enterprises; inventories existing resources and products; identifies products that are already providing income for local people; and, eliminates non-viable products. Local people interested in developing enterprises determine economic objectives.

*Outcome:* short-list of products on which to base the next phase of MA&D; identification of local people interested in developing enterprises; understanding of the social, environmental, technical and institutional contexts of a range of products; an interest group formed to undertake the next phase.

**Phase 2: Identify Products, Markets and Means of Marketing**

The second phase of MA&D includes selecting promising products, identifying potential markets and discussing the means of marketing.

*Outcome:* list of possible products based on detailed feasibility studies; data collected to design a business plan; formation of interest groups around promising products; formation of a team to undertake final phase.

**Phase 3: Plan Enterprises for Sustainable Development**

In the final phase, the enterprise strategy and business plans are prepared. Entrepreneurs are guided through a pilot phase and training, learn to monitor progress and to adapt when change is needed.

*Outcome:* an enterprise strategy comprising the selected products; marketing and management plans; action-plan to ensure proper implementation; financing obtained as specified in the capital needs statement.