Project Background

It is estimated that some 200,000 people in the Gambia are directly or indirectly dependent on fisheries and their related activities for their livelihoods, with the sub-sector contributing to approximately 3.4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product. Artisanal fisheries provide direct and indirect employment to over 30,000 people. Additionally, fish is the major supplier of animal protein and a major contributor to nutrition for the population. Thousands of post-harvest operators, most of them women are engaged in fish landing, processing (smoking and drying), marketing of the catch, wholesale or retail, and distribution including transportation.

However, it faces low market access and high post-harvest losses due to fish spoilage, attributed to longer storage periods with limited ice and inadequate storage containers. Furthermore, post-harvest practices, such as fish smoking techniques, can be toxic for women as well as fisheries products. Hence it is essential to provide these women with climate-smart fuel-efficient fish processing tools and technologies such as the FAO Thiaroye Technology - FTT stoves and conservation items.

On the other hand, agriculture occupies a prime place in the Gambia’s economy and is a key driver of economic growth. It accounts for approximately 30 percent of GDP and employs nearly half (46.4 percent) of the working population and over 80 percent of the rural working population.

This FAO technical cooperation programme aims to strengthen the capacity of fish processors and traders, especially women, through the production of high-quality fish products using the newly introduced FTT and cold chain equipment to improve food security and income.

The intervention also supports urban and peri-urban smallholder farmers’ production and post-harvest system through capacity building in efficiency and effective use of agri-inputs, vegetable products conservation and storage as well as the provision of drip irrigation system and high-quality agri-inputs and some useful equipment to women.

In the next pages, we highlight some of the major achievements of this project in 2021.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Women farmers learn the art of vegetable production, pest management and marketing
- Empowering women farmers to ease challenges in horticulture production
- Women fish traders trained on fish handling and hygienic practices
- Reducing post-harvest losses through the use of cooler boxes
Women farmers learn the art of vegetable production, pest management and marketing

Forty women farmers from three communities within the Kanifing Municipality received a three-day intensive hands-on training in vegetable production, marketing and integrated pest management at the Model Horticulture Training Centre in Wellingara in August. The Horticulture Technical Services Unit under the Department of Agriculture (DoA) is conducting the training with support from the project. Participants come from Bakoteh, Kerr Serign and Bakau Old Cape Road Communal Gardens.

Addressing participants at the opening ceremony on Wednesday, Mr. Sariyang Jobarteh, Deputy Director General of the Department of Agriculture commended FAO for what he described as “timely assistance and yet another important milestone in the FAO-Gambia partnership”.

“This is why the Government and notable partners like FAO place a high premium on the sub-sector and this is why this FAO-funded TCP project was developed amongst a series of other initiatives to help enhance the productivity of the sub-sector,” Mr. Jobarteh said. “This is particularly important as we step up efforts to transform our food systems for the better.”

“The training equipped us with the technical know-how to produce better in an innovative and smart way,” Ms. Mariama Bah a participant and women farmer said. We know those skills will ultimately address poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition. These sessions will enable us to share the knowledge and skills acquired with other members of our communities to help boost production and productivity. They will also contribute towards improved lives and livelihoods in the Municipality and beyond.”

Empowering women farmers to ease challenges in horticulture production

In early August, FAO handed over an assortment of gardening inputs and tools to women farmers in Bakoteh, Kerr Serign and Bakau Old Cape Point Road, through the Horticulture Technical Services Unit (HTS) under the Department of Agriculture.

FAO procured the items worth over half a million Dalasis through this project. The initiative aimed at helping ease challenges limiting horticultural production and productivity in the Gambia. Horticulture development is a top priority for both the Gambian Government and FAO as captured in the National Development Plan 2018 – 2021 and the FAO Gambia Programming Framework 2018 – 2021. The activity was also perceived as FAO’s recognition of the role of women in the horticulture sector.

“FAO has for over four decades been consistently rendering invaluable services to the Gambia and has also continued to be our traditional and most trusted partner in the agriculture sector,” said the Deputy Director General of the Department of Agriculture Mr. Sariyang Jobarteh. “Once again, we commend the organization of this gigantic gesture,” he added.

The contribution is expected to scale up female farmers production and productivity. They would be able to raise collective nurseries and adopt good agronomic practices to achieve improved Food and Nutrition Security and economic empowerment.
Women fish traders trained on fish handling and hygienic practices

Thirty-three women fish traders and processors operating along the coastal fishing communities received training on fish handling and hygienic practices. The training sessions were received by women mainly from Barra, Banjul to Kartong fishing communities and was provided by fisheries officers through the project.

The training covered elements such as proper fish handling, fish preservation using ice and best hygienic practices in fish processing (smoking). The training aimed to improve the technical know-how of the fish traders and processors on proper fish handling and best hygienic practices in order to enhance the reduction of post-harvest losses.

“This training was truly an eye-opener for us,” said Amie Gaye from Barra. “The training has helped us boost our capacity on fish handling coupled with best hygiene practices”.

Reducing post-harvest losses through the use of Cooler Boxes

Two hundred and fifty cooler boxes were procured by FAO through the project and handed over to the beneficiaries through the Ministry of Fisheries. Provision of the cooler boxes is expected to reduce the high post-harvest losses due to fish spoilage, attributed to longer storage periods with limited ice and inadequate storage containers.

“Post-harvest losses have been major challenges in the fish trade, as this results in huge loss to traders,” said Sirra Njai Sanyang, FAO Programme officer. “The two hundred and fifty cooler boxes provided to 209 female and 41 male fish traders will enable them to properly keep their fish with ice in a cold chain. These materials provided is envisaged to reduce post-harvest losses and improve food security while providing good marketing opportunities to the women and increasing their income.”

In addition, 152 fish handing materials, comprising of tarpaulins, gloves, aprons, knives and buckets are provided to the fish traders and processors in the coastal and inland fishing communities. This will help to improve their activities in the proper fish handling and best hygienic practices.