

Training Workshop Report on Enhancing Stakeholder Participation in The Gambia National Forest Programme



**Tendaba Camp
5th – 10th July 2010**

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1. Background and rationale of the training

National Forest Program is a process which enhances stakeholder participation in Sustainable Forest Management regimes at national and international levels through the participation of the Non -State actors, Local communities, Central and Local Government in the formulation of policies relevant to forestry, plan development and implementation of forest development activities.

The decentralization of forest resource management is a salient point in the New Forest Policy (2010 – 2019) of The Gambia. This position had been strengthened by the enactment of the Local Government Act 2002, the review of Forest Act 1998 and Gambia Environmental Action Plan II which calls upon the municipal and local authorities to gradually assume the responsibilities of forest management at community levels.

It has been generally acknowledged that the forestry sector has indeed a great potential in improving rural livelihoods through sustainable utilization of tree and forest resources. It is in recognition of this fact that Sustainable Forest Management has become an integral part of The Gambia's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and Vision 2020.

The low involvement of the rural populace, non- state actors and the Local Authorities in forest protection has been the underlying cause of forest degradation in the country. To tackle the problem of forest resource degradation, the Department of Forestry with the support of several donor partners has taken the lead in the drive to involve the local communities, non- state actors and the Local Authorities in forest protection and development under the general guidance of the Gambia Forest Management Concept (GFMC) as enshrined in the National Forest Action Plan (NFAP). Participatory Forest Management regimes have become a household word in many rural communities throughout the country. After ten years of the implementation of the NFAP, there still remains a strong case for continuous donor support to consolidate the NFAP and build capacities of stakeholders in its implementation.

1.1 Training Objectives

The training on enhancing stakeholder participation in the National Forest Program (NFP) of The Gambia focused on the following objectives:

- To improve the understanding of Stakeholders on NFP context, rationale and principles, its dynamics and relevance to collaborative Natural Resource Management and Sustainable Livelihoods;
- To enable Participants examine/ reflect on different steps of participatory and contextual planning approaches in order to make informed decision regarding which approach can be used to the best advantage;
- To introduce Participants to the principles and skills on Participatory Natural Resource Management processes ; and

- Outline a process and provide tools that guide multi- stakeholders' participation on the NFP.

1.2 Training Duration: The duration of the training on Enhancing Stakeholder Participation in the NFP was five days and half- a- day was devoted to the introduction of the training approach, guiding principles as well as participants.

1.3 Outputs:

By the end of the Training, the participants are able to:

- Demonstrate and understand the steps, dynamics and properties of NFP process;
- Identify and assess elements of participatory approaches towards enhancing stakeholder participation in NFAP;
- Demonstrate skills in facilitating stakeholder engagement in the development and implementation of the NFAP priority activities at all levels; and
- Demonstrate skills in identifying and analyzing stakeholders' interest, and effectively engage stakeholders in decisions regarding NFP process.

1.4 Participants and participation

The participants of the workshop were Stakeholders in the Forestry sector (policy makers, forest technicians, Community Forest Committees, Forest-Based CBOs, NGOs, Representatives of Local Government Authorities, Representatives of Forest User Groups and Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources.)

The training was designed to enhance the capacity of the stakeholders in NFP design and implementation. A total of 17 stakeholder representatives were trained (4 Female & 13 Male). The expected outcome of the intervention will be increased capacities at all levels for enhancing NFP participation and improved livelihood of forest dependant communities as well as improving the forest condition.

The justification for the type of participants was based on the following criteria:

- ❑ Influence over forestry matters;
- ❑ Influence over tenure (land and tree);
- ❑ Advocacy roles;
- ❑ Strong political influence over forestry matters; and
- ❑ Affectedness by forestry decisions.

Participation was extremely high, although participants' initial understanding of the NFP process varies. See annexes for the participant list.

The workshop approach was:

- ❑ plenary sessions presentation;
- ❑ group work sessions;
- ❑ experimentation; and
- ❑ Analytical Reflections.

2. The training Workshop

2-1 Preparatory activities

The preparatory work of the training workshop began with the identification of participants, circulation of invitations and pre-workshop assignment were delivered to all the participants and follow-up was done to get timely responses and confirmation of their participation.

Material preparation

The team of facilitators arrived at the workshop venue on Friday 2nd July 2010, two days before participants arrive in order to carryout some preparatory work. This is done so as to have smooth running and avoid break of concentration and momentum during the training. Big sheets were prepared for introducing various tools and exercises during the deliberations of the workshop, and for group exercises by participants in the hall as well as during field programs. The preparation was hectic but facilitators considered it important as it encourages participants to take part in group work and rotational presentation afterwards.

Dry run

The materials that were prepared were discussed to have consensus among the facilitators for the mode of presentation and sharing of responsibilities.

2-2 The training

The workshop was held in Tendaba Camp, Kiang Central District at the conference room. Staff members of the line Departments, University of The Gambia, Local Non-Governmental Organizations, Local Authorities, National Assembly and other Community-Based Organizations in the Natural Resource sector attended it.

The Permanent Secretary (PS), Ministry of Forestry and the Environment (MOFEN) in his opening remarks emphasized the importance and the function of forest ecosystems for livelihood improvement. He elaborated on the activities implemented by the Department of Forestry (DoF) in the Regions of The Gambia. The MOFEN PS reiterated on the successes registered in Participatory Forestry, such as the handing over of vast forest lands to communities in the form of Community Forestry (CF) as well as the involvement of communities in the management of gazzeted Forest Parks nation-wide.

The NFP Focal Person Mr. Sambou Nget on his part mentioned the various activities been Implemented by DoF through the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. The Focal Person presented some of the short comings of stakeholder participation in the NFP process such as inadequate capacities to advance the process. He elaborated the need to enhance participation of all key stakeholders in order to mitigate those constraints. The importance of integrated approach in tackling that menace was proposed instead of the island approach. He congratulated the donors for supporting the processes of The Gambia NFP.

Prior to the opening ceremony, the workshop facilitator presented the agenda of the workshop for adoption. The presentation continued with an overview of the training (Context Analysis, Principles, Experimentation, Analytical Reflection and Contextualized Planning). Participants were asked to highlight their expectations looking at three key areas, Content and output, Training approach including facilitation plus Logistics and organization. Among other things the participants expect to understand the principles, practices and tools, tools that promote participation. Other expectations of the participants were a good atmosphere to learn and share their views on forestry as stakeholders and as well as good logistical support and transport re-imbusement.

The session proper began with NFP Context Analyzes, through visioning exercise were participants were asked to draw their own vision about a good NFP which they did. This was to test their understanding and first hand information on NFP at the beginning of the training, which was reviewed at the later part of the training to see if their visions changed. This was followed by the assessment of participation in the different phases on NFP through group works, using various tools and methods.

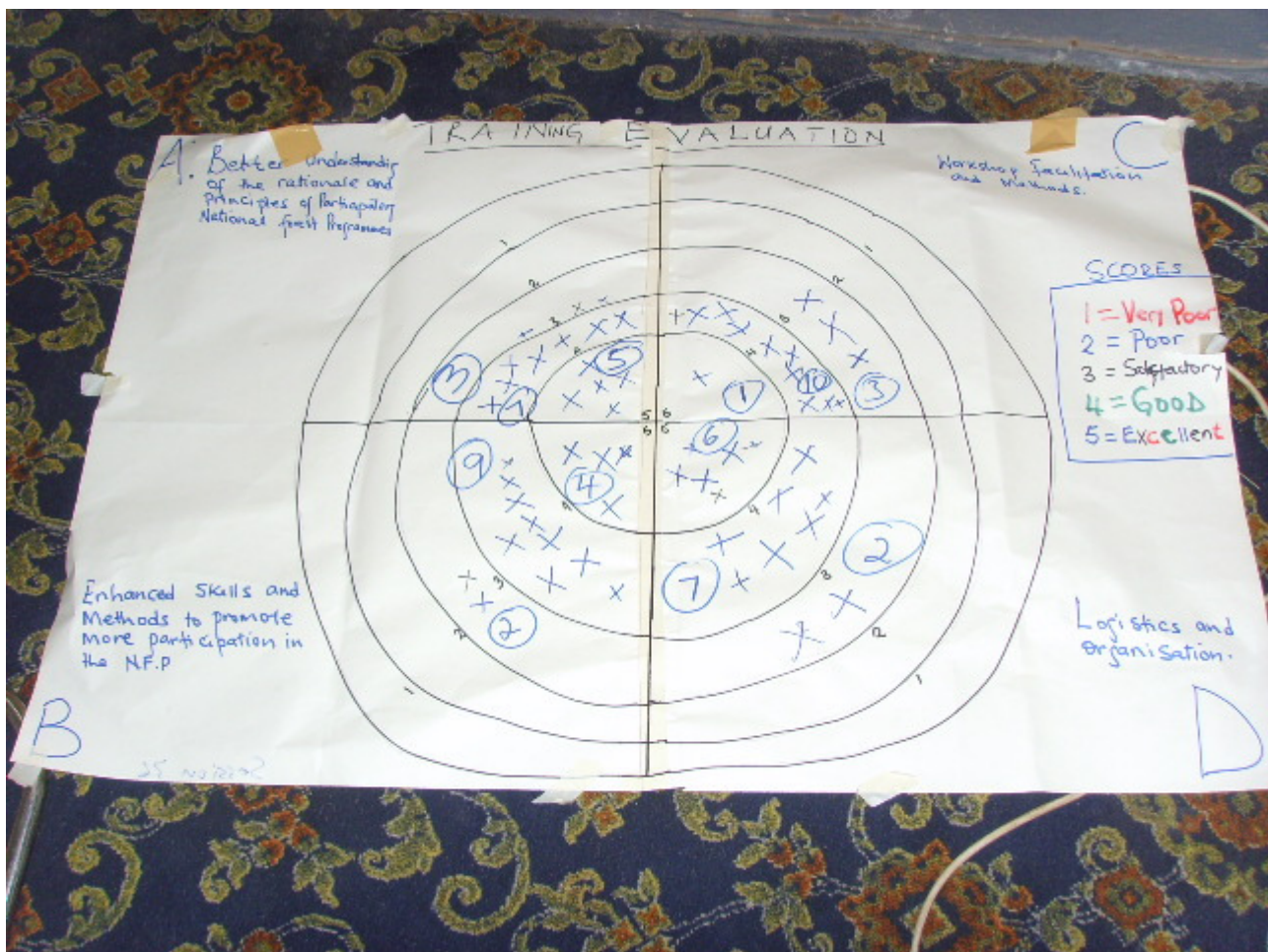
The rationale and Principles of multi-stakeholder participation in NFPs were presented to workshop participants by the facilitator, followed by Forest stakeholder analysis which was done in group work. Various stakeholder groups went in to their respective groups to do the exercise. Various participatory tools were presented, all geared towards participation in NFP, role play as a group exercise involving facilitators, villagers, wood users, NFP Facilitators and Forestry Department staff were involved. At the end of the exercise there was a group reflection on the role play.

For the Experimentation, three study areas were identified, one of which is a CF village which attained the Community Forest Management Agreement status since 1997, the other, a village which is mainly engaged in forest utilization for livelihood, while the third one is a group of FD field staff. Participants were divided in three groups, each led by a facilitator to look into deforestation as a problem, and analyze it so as to know the root cause. Team assignments were done which led us to having the Assistant Director of FD in a Fish Bowl exercise, having to respond to comments by various stakeholders whilst taking note of recommendations. There were reflection assessments on the field programme involving the resource persons as well the target groups during practicum.

The Analytical Reflection was the team preparation of methods from the field programme as a group exercise, presentation of field programme methods reflection as group exercise. There was a field programme stakeholder analyses as a group and presentation of field programme resource person assessment. Personal and peer review as an individual exercise was also conducted, where a participant assess him or herself and each participant will be assessed by the other, which will later be compared by the individual participant but everything is done in secret. The final session under this heading was strategizing to address challenges in the NFP context as a group exercise.

On Contextual Planning, there was a priority ranking of strategies as a group work which led the participants to developing an action plan to address the identified challenges in the Gambian NFP. The planning matrix is presented on the annexes.

After each plenary presentation on the methodological and procedural approach to sessions, participants were divided into working groups based on their respective functions and mandate in the NFP process to analyze issues related popular participation in the process. Various tools relevant for enhancing stakeholder participation in the NFP were presented and exercises were also conducted to enrich participants' knowledge and skills on facilitation of the process. The participants were also requested to suggest ways of improving participation in NFP for poverty alleviation, rural development and Sustainable Forest Management. The results of the group work were presented in plenary sessions. The comment and suggestions that emerged from these group works would go a long way in enriching stakeholder participation in the NFP. At the end of the workshop, participants were requested to evaluate themselves alongside peer review methods and, an, overall training evaluation were applied. In the latter exercise, each participant was given a vote to place it along a scale, ranging from one to five and giving reason (s) for their scores. The photo result of the evaluation is presented below.



These results indicated a high level of appreciation of the training and the important contributions stakeholders can make to Sustainable Forest management and Poverty

Alleviation in the context of NFP. The recommendations made by the participants in the working groups will be incorporated into their plans.

In conclusion, participants expressed the need to finalize the draft action plan and present it to their supervisors for final adoption and implementation of the agreed strategies for the sustainable management of the forest ecosystems in The Gambia. The technical and financial support from FAO was applauded by participants and the need to expand the process / activities to other stakeholders in the forestry sub- sector.

3. Recommendations and follow- up of NFP process

Based on the outcomes of the training, the facilitators recommends following accompanying measures:

Mainstreaming of the training on Enhancing stakeholder participation in the NFP on curriculum development of Forestry Training School at Kafuta

Efforts should be made through the NFP Facility to work closely with the Forestry Training School develop modules on Enhancing Stakeholder participation in the Gambia NFP, test it and finally incorporate it in their curriculum. This is an important step towards institutionalize the NFP process as this inclusion will give the opportunity to all Forestry students to consider principles and rationale of NFP as an added tool towards Sustainable Forest Management principles.

More engagement of Human and Material Resources for NFP Implementation

Capacity building program for Forestry Stakeholders, both horizontally and vertically is a key to successes of the National Forest programme. A core group of Trainers should be trained in the process to facilitate top down Regional and District trainings.

Additional technical and managerial support can be provided by FD. It is recommended that the NFP Focal Person based at FD should give his full capacity and time in making the objectives of the NFP a success, through regular and coordinated technical support to other institutions who are in direct day-to-day contact with the community. Exploration of funding mix for the Gambian NFP should be sought especially to support the review process of the National Forest Action Plan and subsequent development of new NFAP through multi- stakeholder participation.

Processing of backlog of Forest Management Agreements to be awarded to communities

Administrative procedures for handover Forest Ownership takes 4 + years, even though community ownership is now legally allowed. Therefore, the Forestry Department should ensure in fulfilling that mandate.