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Project Update (January- December 2021)

GCP /GAM/040/EC

Project Background

The “Agriculture for economic growth and food security/nutrition to mitigate migration flow” is a four-year project funded by the European Union (EU) to the Gambia with a budget of GMD 1.2 billion. The project is divided into three components: Component 1: FAO "Agriculture for Economic growth", Component 2: WFP "School meals and Disaster Risk Management" and Component 3: NGOs "Support to the 11th EDF programme in the country".

It is being implemented in the North Bank Region (NBR), Central River Region (CRR), Lower River Region (LRR) and Upper River Region (URR).

The overall programme objective is to create growth and employment opportunities, particularly for women and youth, through improved agricultural productivity as well as access to food, while increasing most vulnerable smallholders' participation in value chains. The programme also recognises the need for enhanced information systems, as well as crises management and prevention to build resilience. In so doing, the programme is expected to mitigate migration flows to Europe.

The FAO component has a budget of USD 14 848 313. It is being implemented by FAO in close partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and its specialized departments, Food Safety and Quality Authority of the Gambia, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, National Disaster Management Agency, Farmer Associations and NGOs. The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture serves as the Chair of the Project Steering Committee.

Towards making Agriculture Extension Services more Responsive: Gov't adopts FAO-EU supported policy and strategy

In 2021, the government of the Gambia through the project, adopted the country's first ever Agriculture Extension Policy and Strategic Plan at a cabinet meeting in Banjul. It is the 9th policy and strategic plan developed through support from the project. This is in line with the project's objective to contribute towards sustainable growth in the agricultural sector, reduce food insecurity and malnutrition, create an enabling environment for improved economic growth and mitigate migration flows to Europe.

Pilot implementation of the policy and the five-year Strategic Plan is underway in two agricultural regions, namely North Bank and Central River Region North. Furthermore, a draft Extension Manual and Code of Conduct is currently under review.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Towards making Agric Extension Services More Responsive: Gov't adopts FAO-EU supported Policy, Strategy.**
- **Innovation for Sustainable, Resilient Food Systems.**
- **Empowering Youths for Economic Growth.**
- **Scaling up Farmer and Pastoral Field Schools Approach**
- **Impact of the FFS/APFS/SILC approach**
- **Progress on the Fight Against FAW**
- **Government Adopts New National Cooperative Policy**
- **Promoting More Sustainable and Productive Agric-Food Systems**
- **Improving access to market for smallholder farmers**

Promoting Innovation for Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems

On 30 March, FAO handed over 201 smart phones to institutions under the Ministry of Agriculture as part of the ongoing support to Government to strengthen Agricultural Extension Services delivery.

Mr. Sariang Jorbateh, Deputy Director General of the Department of Agriculture (DoA) and Mr. Salif Jallow, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Department of Livestock Services (DLS) received the phones (DoA 147 and DLS 54) aimed at promoting and strengthening E-Extension in many parts of the country.



AFAOR and Head of Programmes handing over the phones to the DDG, DOA, Mr. Sariang Jorbateh

Empowering youths for Economic Growth

The Gambian Government and its international development partners including the United Nations (UN) are committed to addressing immigration challenges by 2030 under the Sustainable Development Goal 8, to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.

FAO leads international efforts to defeat hunger and malnutrition. Through the FAO-Gambia Country Programming Framework, the Government of the Gambia has identified the Agriculture and Natural Resources Sectors as key priority areas for investment to stimulate economic growth and sustainable development.

Through the EU-funded project ‘Agriculture for Economic Growth’, FAO has successfully recruited a team of 26 youths who graduated from the Gambia Songhai Initiative (GSI) to serve as Crop Production Assistants in 13 Community Gardens in the North Bank, Lower River, Central River and Upper River Regions of the Gambia.

The engagement of the 26 youths builds on the partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture to strengthen the capacities and resilience of rural communities. The CPAs have received smart phones and training on real-time data collection and reporting on the gardens. The initiative also consolidates gains made following the deployment of 16 GSI graduates to 8 Community Gardens through the EU MDG1c Project in 2016.



FAO Senior Programme Officer, Ousman Touray with the CPAs

Commenting on the intervention, Ms Moshibudi Rampedi, FAO Country Representative said:

“FAO values youth and women empowerment. Youth engagement in the agricultural value chains supports the Gambia’s national development priorities. As we accelerate actions towards the implementation of the UN Decade of Action (2020-2030) and building back better noting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, FAO strives to make agriculture attractive to the youths; their effective participation in the agri-food systems is critical, they are the future. FAO is there grateful for the strategic funding from the EU”.

Strengthening the capacity of Apex Farmer Associations

In April 2021, National stakeholders validated a five-year strategic Plan for the National Coordinating Organization for the Farmers Association in the Gambia (NACOFAG).

FAO supported the updating of the document that expired in 2016 through funding from the Project. The validation workshop was funded by the ROOTS Project under the Ministry of Agriculture.

Empowering women with life- skills

In 2021, the project supported the training of 266 vulnerable smallholder farmers and youths on basic literacy and numeracy in 4 local languages across the project regions. Trainees including, FFS/APFS participants were drawn from 33 community-vegetable gardens

established by various FAO projects, and Farmers field schools participants.

The Adult & Non-Formal Education Unit of the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education conducted the training aimed at enhancing business, entrepreneurship and financial management skills of farmers and improve access to markets and financial services and income.

During a Field Monitoring Mission, the target beneficiaries expressed gratitude to FAO and partners for implementing such a programme. They noted that the intervention has increased social cohesion, enabled them to recognise alphabets and numbers, including names on mobile phones, weigh and measure produce (in kilos) and demarcate vegetable garden beds.

They also reported acquiring the skills to understand basic information on clinical cards for babies.

Improved information gathering and dissemination on food security and nutrition for zero hunger

In 2021, FAO through the project procured 5 internet routers, 57 smartphones, 4 laptops and a printer for the Department of Planning (DoP) and Gambia Livestock Marketing Agency (GLMA) to support operationalisation of their respective database and website management. The intervention was designed to consolidate gains made through the project's earlier support to the two institutions which included the development of functional one-stop-shop information database including websites to facilitate real-time data collection of crop, livestock production and marketing.

Furthermore, the project funded step down training on e-data collection tool using tablets/smart phones for 57 data collectors drawn from DoP and GLMA. The project also supported the transformation of the National Agriculture Sample Survey (NASS) under the purview of the DoP into e-data collect and aggregate system. The aim is to ease annual agricultural surveys and computation of the agriculture contribution to GDP. The project also supported periodic market monitoring by DoP as well as provided technical support to the overall Market Information System administration.

Scaling up the Farmer and pastoral Field schools approach

Over 500 Farmer Field School Facilitators and 50 Agro-Pastoral Field School (APFS) Facilitators who were recruited through the EU funding have been trained in climate smart agriculture and the use of smartphones for effective extension services delivery.

Ten Farmer Field School/Agro-Pastoral Field Schools have been upgraded to Farmer Based Schools. FAO in collaboration with ITC supported the initiative led by DoA/DLS within the principle of Delivering as One (DaO).

Over 15 420 crop farmers within 514 Farmer Field Schools have had increased knowledge in GAP on crop production.

Furthermore, 1 500 livestock farmers within 50 Pastoral Field Schools have had increased knowledge on GAP on livestock production including animal health issues. Each of the 50 APFS with 30 members have also received 10 goats (8 females and 2 males) each for multiplication and veterinary extension support.



Dawda Njie, a APFS facilitator posing for a photo with his goats

Towards Increasing Knowledge on Good Agriculture Practices (GAP)

Training is at the core of the project activities. Four staff members of the Departments of Agriculture and Livestock Services have completed the FFS/PFS Master Trainers Programme. As a result, the country is no longer recruiting international consultations to provide the service. Meanwhile, 13 FFS facilitators out of 375 have been recruited as part of mainstream agriculture extension system.



Mr. Lang Kira Jawla, FFS/APFS Facilitator & Agric Extension Agent

Impact of the FFS/APFS/SILC approach

In an interview with project beneficiaries in 2021, they explained the challenges they had faced before this project included lack of knowledge on good agronomic practices, weak agriculture extension support and services, high crops and livestock pests and diseases, low yields and low earnings from agriculture, lack of knowledge and skills in group governance, records management.

According to them, the FFS, AFPS and SILC interventions have contributed significantly in reducing these challenges and had promoted social cohesion in the communities, boost productivity, food security and incomes and, thus changing the lives and livelihoods of many people in rural Gambia.

Mr. Dawda Njie of Jamali Ganyado Village is CRR North is one of the 13 FFS/APFS facilitators employed by the Department of Agriculture. He said:

“I was a poor food insecure farmer. My produce barely sustain my household for three months. But praises be to Allah (God), since I became a Farmer Field School facilitator, I have become food self-sufficient in food. I am also able to make some savings from which I buy small ruminants and I am also in the process of building a new cement blockhouse, thus it has been a huge advancement for me [Alhamdulillah]. At the onset, I was scared, being alone and some sceptics were also discouraging me, but today I have proved the sceptics wrong.”

“For instance, most of the SILC members after every SILC share out, they bought small ruminants (goats/sheep). Some of the animals have reproduced twice. Besides that, prior to the establishment of the SILC, some people used to borrow money to buy clothing for their children during festive occasions but all of that is now history. They are able to make savings for investment in household needs”.



Some of Dawda's goats and cement blocks

Another success story of the project is Mr. Anthony AC Mendy, Senior Agricultural Officer who doubles as a Focal Point for FFS and a Certified Master Trainer. He said:

“My involvement in the FFS approach, has transformed my life in many ways. Currently, I am the only extension officer who is trained and elevated to a Master Trainer. The country is no longer hiring an international consultant to come and serve as a Master Trainer on FFS and now we have taking up the lead to be training Farmer Field School facilitators.”

“FFS approach has greatly reduced the burden on extension workers through the establishment of over 500 FFS with a vibrant network which is reaching over to a larger audience of farmers. Prior to the project intervention, there were fewer extension agents who could meet and serve many farmers.”

“Covid-19 peak period was a difficult moment for extension service delivery because of the strict restrictions on public gatherings. But thanks to the WhatsApp group created by the FFS facilitators, (which comprises both FFS facilitators, senior extension staff and policy and decision makers as well as FAO experts) and the smart phones provided by FAO, e-extension has become the norm for extension workers. The platform provide opportunity for real-time discussion and solution to burning issues related to the work of extension workers”.



Lang Kira Jawla teaching farmers at his FFS demonstration plot

Promoting Healthy, sustainable Soils

In 2021, the project stepped up support towards promoting healthy soils in the Gambia. The NARI soil Lab was rehabilitated for installation of Atomic Absorbtion Spectrum meter and an International expert was contracted to lead the development of the first ever national fertilizer policy. The draft is currently being reviewed.

As part of ongoing efforts to address the issues of aflatoxin on public health and socio-economic growth and development, the project procured and distributed 9 metric tons of Aflasafe to groundnut farmers. The initiative spearheaded by the department of Agriculture was carried

out by the project team in close partnership with the National Food Security, Processing and Marketing Corporation. According to the corporation, high levels of Aflatoxin in the groundnuts produced in the country is barring the produce from entering the European markets and thus depriving the country of the much-needed foreign exchange earnings.

The high prevalence of Aflatoxin in the soils is the primary cause of the issue and addressing this will improve the country's groundnut value chain and market

"More Aflasafe we use will translate into good quality groundnut for local consumption and export, increase foreign exchange earnings, and improve public health, Ousman Tourey the Project Coordinator said "Therefore, we are encouraging private sector participation to make Aflasafe readily available and affordable for the farmers",

Furthermore, NARI has also benefitted from improved access to technology in research and development. Rehabilitation works on the breeding laboratory at NARI and the pesticide residue and diagnosis laboratories of Plant Protection Services (PPS) have also been completed. The project has also procured lab equipment and reagents for the facilities as well as 2 Lab-top computers for PPS and 2 lap-top and 1 printer for NARI for documentation of information.

Progress on the Fight Against FAW

In 2021, the project intensified its support towards the fight against the Fall Armyworm (FAW) through the strengthening of Plant Pests and Diseases surveillance. Twenty-four mobile phones were given to PPS, Extension and NARI staff.

The recipients have also been trained in how to use FAMEWS – a **mobile app for monitoring and early detection of Fall Armyworm**.

A nationwide survey on FAW distribution and damage on maize and other cereals was undertaken in September.

The objective of the inspection mission was to strengthen FAW integrated management activities in the six agricultural regions and conduct sensitizations on FAW Integrated Pest Management (IPM) options with extension staffs and farmer groups.

Monitoring took place at various levels (communities, districts, and regions) within the country to systematically gather data to inform policy makers and practitioners about the presence and severity of the pest across the Gambia.

The mission was also designed to help to assess pest pressure (e.g. the intensity of FAW infestation) and crop performance in the fields in order to evaluate both the economic risk of FAW infestation and the potential efficacy of FAW control interventions.

The mission was also aimed at meeting farmers and sensitizing them on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques with focus on FAW.



Farmer at Madina, Sami, URR North being sensitized on the signs and symptoms of FAW infestation

Gov't Adopts New National Cooperative Policy

Cooperative development is an option for spurring economic inclusion and sustainable growth, thereby overcoming poverty, and enhancing food security. In the drive to improve the functioning of national cooperatives and food Enterprises associations in the agricultural sector, The Government of the Gambia on 3 November, 2021, adopted Gambia National Cooperative policy 2021 – 2030 during a cabinet meeting. FAO facilitated the formulation of the policy through the project.

The overall objective of the Policy is to harness the potential of cooperatives to contribute to the economic growth of the country, reduce migration flows towards Europe and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The policy seeks to serve the needs and aspirations of members of cooperative societies and contribute effectively to the attainment of the National Development Goals.

National Cooperative Policy validation

The policy was validated in March 2021 At a national forum presided over by the Minister of Agriculture.

"FAO remains committed to supporting the Gambia to roll out its ambitious cooperatives revitalisation and development initiative to stimulate socio-economic growth and sustainable development," said FAO Country Representative, Ms. Moshibudi Rampedi at the event.



The Agriculture Minister, FAO Representative and participants pose for a family portrait at validation workshop

There is consensus among international institutions and the development community that cooperatives may hold one of the keys to pathway of rural prosperity around the world. Cooperative enterprises are suitable organisations to help people become active agents that improve their own lives and address dimensions of poverty and exclusion, she added.

Ms Rampedi used the opportunity to advocate for more government support to the 'cooperatives' revitalisation process, noting that there can only be viable, productive, and efficient cooperatives when the Government provides the policy and regulatory frameworks needed.

In her keynote statement, Mrs Amie Fabureh, Minister of Agriculture, acknowledged with gratitude the support of FAO and partnership with the Gambian Government, especially in the Agriculture Sector. She described the event as another key milestone in the ongoing reform of institutions under her portfolio.

Mrs Fabureh underscored the importance government attaches to revitalising and transforming the cooperative societies in the country to make them drivers of economic growth and poverty eradication. She reassured of “the government's unwavering commitment to continue working closely with FAO and all other stakeholders to achieve the desired cooperative policy”.

The Rice Value-Chain Transformation Project (RVCTP) under the Ministry of Agriculture funded the validation workshop.

Promotion of effective Research and Extension Services for Seed Security

FAO, through the project, has intensified support to NARI towards increasing genetic potential of crops for increased sustainable production, productivity and diversification. This intervention has yielded positive results. In June 2021, NARI handed over a total of 18 new breeder seeds to the

National Seed Secretariat (NSS) for foundation seed development. These include six rice, five groundnuts, two maize, five cowpea varieties. These seeds of hope will be distributed to farmers across the country for further multiplication.



Photo of new rice variety, at Jahally rice fields

FAO hands over fruit flies attractants and traps to the Department of Agriculture

Fruit and vegetable production is one of the fastest-growing agricultural sectors in the Gambia, and provides both income and employment to growers and exporters. Mangoes, citrus, chillies, papaya, and watermelon are among the most common fruits and vegetables grown for domestic urban markets and export.

According to reports from National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI), the damage caused by fruit flies on crops, particularly mango, is estimated at 35 percent. The pest has increased interceptions and destruction of exported fruits from the Gambia that are destined for the EU market.

In a bid to address this issue as well as boost production and export of mangoes, FAO handed over an assortment of fruit flies pheromone attractants and traps as well as two laptops and one printer to officials of Plant Protection Services (PPS) of the Department of Agriculture.

In a ceremony held at the PPS grounds in Yundum, Ousman Touray, Senior Programme Officer at FAO, handed over the equipment on behalf of the FAO Representative. The items included: Methyl Eugenol (MEe), cure lure, Terpinyl Acetate (TA), trimilure, torula yeast tablets, DDVP, and yellow traps.

“The information derived from this will help to design timely and effective control measures against fruit flies in the major mango growing regions of the country” Touray said.



Ousman Touray of FAO (right), handing over items to Lamin Darboe, Deputy Director of Administration, DOA, ©FAO/David Kujabi

In receiving the items, Lamin S. Darboe, Principal Plant Protection Officer, hailed the initiative, describing it as timely.

“With this equipment, fruit flies damage on mangoes will be reduced and the quality of fruits produced by farmers will be improved. Consequently this will minimize unnecessary interception and rejection of commodities destined for export to EU market” he said.

Towards mitigating the impacts of food insecurity and malnutrition on vulnerable households

The project in 2021, provided both technical and financial support for the National stakeholders screening survey of vulnerable farmers identified in pre-harvest assessment and Cadre Harmonize (CH) of CILSS as severely and moderately food insecure. The National Disaster Management Agency led the activity which identified over 12,000 farmers as being in crisis situation requiring urgent attention.

The Cadre Harmonisé (CH) is an early warning tool developed upon request by stakeholders (States, International Organizations, Civil Societies and NGOs) and their partners, namely members of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA). The main objective of the CH is to help the country to better prevent food crises and, if necessary, to quickly identify the affected populations by food and nutritional problems. Thus, it helps to take adequate measures to improve food and nutrition status. CH helps improve decision-making to address food and nutrition crises and implement actions towards strengthening resilience.

In 2021, the project also provided fertilizer to 393 farmers affected by the 7th July 2021 windstorm in the NBR. In a related development, a total of 3,255 bags of fertilizer (6:20:10) were distributed to farmers to improve groundnut production and as revolving funds.



Farmers, FAO staff posing for a photo with the fertilizer, ©FAO

Promoting resilience building and all-inclusiveness

Smallholder farmers in the Gambia are identified as needing greater access to finance to contribute to increased food crop production in the Gambia. Through this project, the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO in partnership with an NGO consortium introduced a Farmer Resilience Fund called “Savings and Internal Lending Committee” (SILC) in more than 140 communities using Farmer Field Schools (FFS) as the entry point. The scheme provides access to loans for members for agricultural production activities, as well as access to a social fund in the event of losses after fire or other disaster or the death of spouse and children. In 2021, about 4,350 people of whom more than 95 percent are female) were involved in SILC.

The FFS at Jahaur Mandinka in Lowe Saloum District, Central River Region is one of the communities engaged in SILC. The sum of D134, 254.00 being the savings of 30 members comprising 29 women and 1 man was shared amongst members at their third share-out. Mrs. Adama Jallow who is also engaged in petty trading was the highest recipient for the 3rd time. She received D9, 195.00.

Both the SILC members and the technical partners have spoken highly of the intervention during the event and in interviews with the national broadcaster - GRTS. They reported that the initiative has united them, promoted social cohesion as well as empowered them economically and thus contributed to improving lives and livelihoods.

Mr. Mustapha Nyass, AVISU SILC Project Supervisor reported that the initiative is a “game changer” in the fight against poverty. He thanked FAO and the EU for the intervention. Several women including Mrs. Adama Jallow said that they have used the money they received in November 2019 to buy sheep, engage in petty trading, buy farm inputs and provide for the household needs. Some of

these animals now have offspring. Adama's sheep has since delivered 3 times. "I sold the ram delivered in 2020 to support the education of my child at the tertiary level", she said.

Promoting more sustainable and productive Agric-Food systems

An estimated 23 percent of the Gambia's total arable land of 117,329 hectares is suitable for horticulture production, but less than 3 percent (3 519.9 hectares) is currently cultivated.

FAO, in close partnership with the Government of the Gambia and key development partners notably the European Union (EU) is stepping up efforts to help sustainably address these challenges.

Through the project, FAO has provided vegetable gardens to nine communities in the North Bank, Central River, Upper River and Lower River regions.

These gardens are equipped with solar-powered irrigation systems and post-harvest infrastructure. These multi-million Gambian Dalasis investments are designed to help contribute towards ensuring the mass adaptation of innovative and transformative agricultural practices and thus facilitate the full and sustainable exploitation of the great potential of the horticulture sector to make the Gambian population well-nourished and healthy for national economic growth and prosperity, leaving no one behind. The interventions will build the capacities and resilience of rural communities to enable them to unlock the untapped potential of the horticulture sector, make it more climate-smart, productive and sustainable to spur socio-economic growth.

Garden Management Committee members in these communities have been trained on how to maintain the solar irrigation system. Ten people were identified by the beneficiary communities in each of the sites to participate in the trainings held onsite. More than 75 percent of the participants were women and youths. This highlights the community leaders' recognition of the role of women and youth in agriculture and the fight against poverty, hunger, malnutrition, unemployment and irregular migration in their respective communities.

Improving access to market for smallholder farmers

The project supported the conduct of a comprehensive value chain analysis of priority agro-commodities (Groundnut, Cowpea, Maize, Rice, Millet, Tomato, Mango, Chicken, Small Ruminant) to inform government and partners on the gaps for upgrading.

The project is also facilitating the construction of ten feeder roads of about 40km linking community vegetables gardens to the main roads to ease access to markets. Works are expected to be completed during the second quarter of 2022.

Towards preventing food losses

The Construction of 5 Cereal and seed stores has been completed. These facilities will be handed over to the beneficiaries during the first quarter of 2022 for use.

Meanwhile, rehabilitation works on the Gambia's only vegetable cold pack-house is underway. When completed, the facility will help ease commercialization of vegetable from the rural areas to the urban areas and thus address the perennial problem of post-harvest loss and the high dependency on imported vegetables.



Newly built Cereal and Seed Store at Sandu Darsilami, URR

With the funding support of the European Union and the technical support of the Government of the Gambia



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