



The Gambia

**Thematic Group on
Rural Development
and Food Security**
Established: 1999

MEMBERSHIP

UN: FAO; UNDP; UNICEF;
WFP

Government: Department of
State for Agriculture;
National Nutrition Agency

NGOs: Action Aid the Gambia;
Association of Non-
Governmental Organizations
(TANGO); Catholic Relief
Services; Concern Universal;
US Peace Corps

Donors: European
Development Fund

Past activities: Support to
WFP in food-for-work
activities; estimation of food
aid needs through rapid rural
appraisal; preparation of
feasibility study on alternative
ways of targeting food aid.



IFAD/R. FAIDOTTI



Strengthening capacities in agricultural training

Training in agriculture plays a decisive role in rural development and food security. However, a lack of awareness about the scope and benefits of training, coupled with a weak training infrastructure, leave many developing countries without effective capacities to fight hunger.

In the Gambia, the Thematic Group recognized the need to enhance national agricultural training. While each of the country's four national training centres operated independently and focused on particular areas of expertise in agriculture, agroforestry, livestock and rural development, it was perceived that there were few

links and little collaboration between centres, if at all. This lack of cooperation between learning institutes had contributed to the generally poor level of awareness amongst the public and the development community at large about what each centre could offer agriculture in the country. There was undoubted scope to enhance collaboration between centres and strengthen the exchange of information and expertise: staff could organize inter-centre visits and exchange programmes to share experiences and lessons learned, which would not only enrich the quality and impact of agricultural

// With a total land mass of 100,700 km², a total population of about 1.37 million people, growing at an unprecedented rate of 4.1 percent per annum, a per capita GDP of US\$ 337, 33 percent of the urban population and 54 percent of the rural population being food-poor and an annual food import bill of US\$ 40 million make the Gambia one of the smallest, most densely populated and food insecure countries in continental Africa.

// STATEMENT OF HIS EXCELLENCY CAPTAIN EDWARD SINGHATEY, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA, WORLD FOOD SUMMIT, ROME, 1996

The Agricultural Training Centres in the Gambia

Agricultural Rural Farmer Training

Centre at Jenoi. Trains rice producers, particularly women and extension workers, using the 'Farmer Field School' methodology.

Chamen Agricultural Training

Centre. Offers training for youth to encourage self-employment in rural areas and curb rural/urban migration.

Njawara Agricultural Training

Centre. A community-owned centre that provides youths and adult farmers with training in agroforestry techniques and sustainable natural resources management.

YBK Training and Demonstration

Centre. Specializes in livestock production and organizes training both for farmers and the field staff of the Department of Livestock Services.

training but avoid possible duplication of efforts.

As a first step, the Thematic Group organized a three-day fact-finding field trip to the four agricultural centres in order to determine their current status and activities and to identify constraints faced by staff. The field trip team consisted of Group members from the Department of State for Agriculture, the European Development Fund, Action Aid the Gambia, Catholic Relief Services, Concern Universal and FAO.

The team discovered that there was poor interaction and information sharing, even within the Government, on the training activities conducted by national institutions. The team recommended that more emphasis and resources be focused on sensitizing development workers and the public on the role and activities of training centres and disseminating information about existing credit schemes on the courses. Furthermore, they suggested that the centres themselves be developed to offer more multi-disciplinary training, to cover such themes related to food security as nutrition and reproductive health, and that they should strengthen impact assessment after training was completed.

As a follow-up to the field trip, the Thematic Group stimulated networking between centres by convening a Consultative Forum (Jenoi Training Centre, 27-28 February 2001). The event, funded by the NGO Action Aid the Gambia, brought together the staff of the four agricultural training centres, Thematic Group members, and civil society to explore areas for cooperation between the training institutes.

This Forum gave participants the opportunity to introduce their individual centres, describe their history, areas of expertise, current programmes and facilities, as well as to voice their constraints. These typically included inadequate funding for centre maintenance and

course organization. After discussion sessions, the Forum participants then designed a work and cooperation plan for the four centres. This key document maps out milestones on the road to full inter-centre collaboration, with activities including the establishment of a coordination mechanism, The Gambia Agricultural Training Centres Network; the sharing of annual workplans; the creation of a databank of resource persons in the centres; the publication of a newsletter; and the production of radio programmes drawing on contributions and input from all the four agricultural training centres in the Gambia.

The Thematic Group has undoubtedly laid the groundwork for a national coordination mechanism for the support of the country's agricultural training centres. The Group is continuing to feed into the initiative by preparing a catalogue of potential donors to support the further development of the centres in the country. A key step in enhancing agricultural productivity in the Gambia.