

Briefing

Forests

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Policy pointers

An integrated landscape approach to forestry and agriculture can help 75 per cent of the Gambia's population diversify away from subsistence agriculture while ensuring sustainable forest management.

Strengthening and empowering the Gambia's farm and forest producer organisations so they can supply local and national markets is the key to eradicating poverty.

Reviewing and simplifying implementation mechanisms for the Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy (ANR) and the 2010–2019 Forest Policy is crucial for devolving land tenure to communities, empowering producer organisations, and improving landscapes' ecosystem health.

Cross-sectoral collaboration, clear communication and equal representation for all stakeholders in the ANR working group will help speed implementation of the policy.

Stronger forest and farm producer groups can reduce poverty in the Gambia

The Gambia is one of the smallest and poorest countries in Africa and is battling with population growth and natural resource depletion, particularly of forests. To reduce poverty and to ensure sustainable natural resources management that keeps development within ecosystem boundaries, the government launched the Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) policy in 2012. The policy aims to empower forest and agriculture producer associations to transform agriculture from a subsistence sector to a robust, market-oriented sector. The Forest and Farm Facility is complementing the government's efforts by coordinating the ANR working group, organising a string of awareness-raising workshops on the ANR policy at regional and district levels and convening meetings between producer organisations and the actors along the value chain of forest and farm commodities.

Most of the Gambia's rapidly growing population of over 1.8 million depend on forestry-related activities in some way. Roughly 40 per cent of the country's population is rural and nearly 80 per cent of all Gambians use fuelwood as their main source of domestic energy. Yet despite this dependence, national statistics record forestry as contributing only about one per cent of GDP.

Forests in the Gambia are feeling the pressure. The latest National Forest Inventory (2008–2010) indicates that overall forest cover has fallen seven per cent in the past decade, mainly due to fuelwood collection, subsistence agriculture, encroachment and rampant field and forest fires.

Agriculture is the Gambia's key economic sector, providing livelihoods for 60 per cent of the population and employment for 75 per cent of the active labour force. Farming contributes 28–33 per cent of GDP, constitutes 90 per cent

of export earnings, provides two-thirds of total household incomes and furnishes 50 per cent of the national food requirements.

Almost half of the Gambia's farmers are women and most are smallholders (up to 85 per cent of farms are smaller than one hectare). Agricultural productivity is generally low as most farming is subsistence agriculture; this is particularly true for food crops (rice, millet, maize and sorghum) although cash crops (cashew, sesame and cotton) also play an important role in subsistence farming.

For most rural Gambians, the main option for moving beyond subsistence agriculture is enterprise based on natural resources. Combining forest-based businesses with farming (for example through agroforestry, production of biomass energy, sustainable forest management, ecotourism, payments for ecosystem services, or

the United Nations' REDD+ scheme) can drive economic growth, employment, and wellbeing. The combination can also be an important way of promoting sustainable forest management.

To maximise this potential, however, forests must be considered as part of landscape ecosystems. All the sectors using such landscapes (agriculture, natural resource extraction, conservation, fisheries, energy and so on) must come up with collaborative and innovative solutions, and integrate their policies and practices so that these reflect stakeholders' many different landscape uses.

Smallholders are often marginalised from decision making processes and isolated from opportunities

Producer groups at the heart of the Gambia Agricultural and Natural Resources policy

Historically, farming, fisheries, energy and forestry have been managed in isolation despite their many links. The Gambia is now promoting several policies that take a 'landscape approach' to rural development, fostering collaborations between the forestry and agricultural sectors, and supporting forest and farm producer groups to achieve food security and reduce poverty.¹

Among these policies, the Agricultural and Natural Resources (ANR) policy (Policy Objectives 4.1.3 and 4.1.4)² launched in 2012 and the Forest Policy (Policy Statement 3.3) specifically address the strengthening of forest and farm producer groups and the creation of the enabling environment for these organisations to thrive.

The ANR policy emerged from a wide consultation and is innovative in two ways. It goes beyond the traditional concept of forestry as a resource conservation issue and considers forests as central to agricultural success because of their role in maintaining soil fertility, providing hand farm tools, increasing rainfall, controlling erosion and providing grazing for livestock. Second, it promotes an integrated approach to managing landscape resources and focuses attention on producer groups.

The ANR policy does not come out of the blue; for the past two decades the government of the Gambia has been looking at empowering local communities and producer organisations. In the early 1990s the Department of Forestry initiated a land tenure reform allocating legal ownership and/or exclusive user rights to local stakeholders and encouraging collaborative approaches towards sustainable participatory forest governance.³

One such approach was to establish community forests. These decentralisation efforts helped community-based forest enterprises to thrive and in general they led to a rich web of such enterprises and cooperatives, and 'apex' producer organisations to which local groups can become affiliated (although most of these are more active and visible in the Greater Banjul area than in the provinces).

Forest and Farm Facility support for the ANR policy

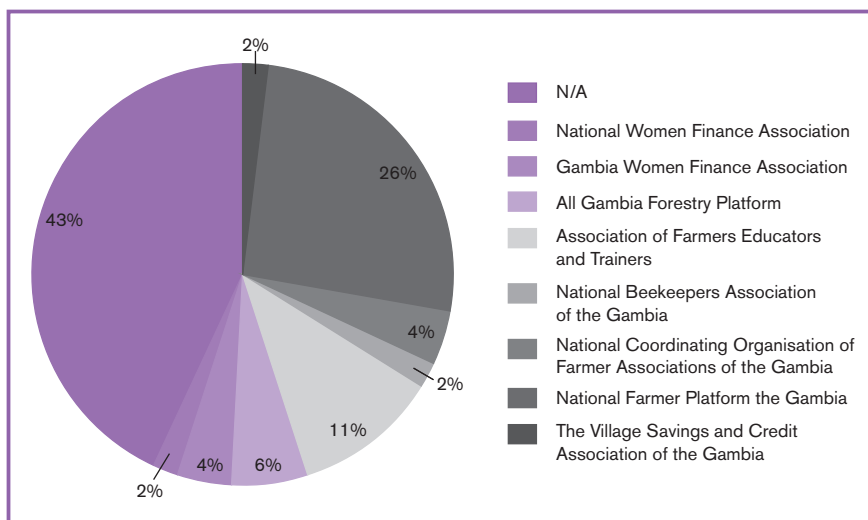
In the Gambia, donors have made relatively few interventions in the natural resource sector and even where projects have been successfully implemented, they have not always proved sustainable over the long term.

The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF, see box) is trying to reverse this trend by basing its intervention on producer organisations' needs, by building on a strong national foundation for participatory forest management, and by supporting the ANR policy's implementation process.

The FFF is also building on work carried out by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's market analysis and development methodology, which helps entrepreneurs to identify and develop viable and sustainable forest-based income-generating activities.

A workshop in Banjul on 10–14 March 2013 discussed priorities for the FFF in the Gambia with government institutions, farmers' organisations and forest communities and agreed a focus on three areas.

Figure 1. Affiliation to apex farmers bodies



- 1. Support decentralisation of tenure rights** by reviewing and simplifying the administrative process that transfers forest ownership to local communities.
- 2. Support ANR implementation** by facilitating the ANR working group, ensuring that all stakeholders are included, and by raising awareness on the ANR policy at national, regional and local levels.
- 3. Strengthen institutional and technical capacities of producer groups** by creating dialogues with the actors involved in the key farm and forest commodities value chains, promoting an integrated approach to aquaculture, agroforestry, ecotourism and creating incentives for small producers to formally join apex bodies.

Why producer groups in the Gambia are not getting enough profits

These three areas of FFF support seek to address some of the factors that hamper swift implementation of the ANR policy and that impede producer organisations and small and medium forest enterprises (SMFEs), especially in rural regions, from generating economic and social benefits. Specifically:

- **Procedures for transferring rights and building forest management and business skills are too complicated and lengthy,**⁴ so that although the 1995 policy set targets for 75 per cent of the Gambia's forests to come under community or private control, only six per cent had been achieved by 2010.
- **Key stakeholders still lack information on the ANR policy,** despite the wide consultation process the ANR undertook. About 70 per cent of producer groups interviewed for a FFF baseline study did not know of the ANR policy. Developing a common knowledge of its opportunities and balancing the representation of government officials and producer groups within the ANR working group will accelerate implementation.
- **Forty three percent of farmers' groups are still unregistered and informal,** meaning they cannot get the services or support (capital, agricultural materials, business capacity, access to market, and so on) offered by the Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry, the National Association of Cooperative and Credit Unions and the National Women Farmers Association.

The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF)

The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) was launched in 2012. Its vision is that "smallholders, communities and indigenous peoples' organisations have improved their livelihoods and the decision making over forest and farm landscapes". The FFF funds partnership agreements and small grants with smallholder, women, community and indigenous peoples' producer organisations and governments at local, national, regional and international levels through the following three pillars:

- **Pillar 1.** Strengthen smallholder, women's, community and indigenous peoples' producer organisations for business/livelihoods and policy engagement.
- **Pillar 2.** Catalyse multi-sectoral stakeholder policy platforms with governments at local and national levels.
- **Pillar 3.** Link local voices and learning to global processes through communication and information dissemination.

Forest and Farm Facility is a partnership — with a management team comprising staff of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and IIED. It is guided by a steering committee with representatives from smallholder family forestry organisations, community forestry organisations, indigenous peoples' organisations, the international research community, business development service provider organisations, the private sector, government, and donors.

FFF is founded on the fact that nearly a third of the world's forests are managed by local people, either formally or informally. It is these local groups of smallholders, women, communities and indigenous peoples that make many forest investments work on the ground. Yet despite their crucial role, forest and farm smallholders are often marginalised from decision-making processes and isolated from economic and market opportunities. The facility aims to help tackle this.

Find out more about the Forest and Farm Facility at: www.fao.org/partnerships/forest-farm-facility

- **Access to funding opportunities is poor.** About 61 per cent of producer groups are self-funded, 32 per cent use donor funding and 7 per cent use government funding to start up their activities. Unregistered groups cannot access donor or government funds, and this restricts development. Some groups already have the resources to undertake medium-sized projects because they have funds from previous activities, but even these groups would benefit greatly from improved access to local saving and credit schemes.
- **Producer groups have insufficient capacity, particularly in technical and business skills, and face difficulty accessing markets** due to a lack of credit, affordable agro-processing and storage facilities, proper handling techniques, value-adding opportunities and 'all weather' roads to markets. Understanding how the supply chain

works and meeting with all its actors would help, and timing product delivery to better meet buyers' demands would reduce wastage.

How the Forest and Farm Facility is helping bridging the gap

The FFF only started in April 2013 but it has already achieved some results in its three priority areas.

1. Helping transfer forest tenure to local communities in the central river region. The FFF assessed 59 community forest areas undergoing Gambia's land titling process to see whether original boundaries had changed and to check that functioning management committees were in place so that legal ownership could be transferred to forest user groups. The next steps are:

- Support forest user groups in the 59 communities to develop the community forest management plans needed to achieve legal ownership of the land and to access markets for wood and non-wood forest products (forest product utilisation permits and mark licences are issued to forest user groups upon approval of their community forest management).
- Strengthen the staff capacity (in terms of numbers and technical skills) within the Department of Forestry so it can promptly process land titling requests in those forest communities where there has been no encroachment and where boundaries have not had major changes.
- Support community forestry committees, as most of the members are new and need orientation on the community forestry concept.

2. Facilitating implementation of the ANR policy. The FFF introduced and has facilitated monthly meetings for the ANR working group and has launched awareness raising meetings on the policy in all the seven regions of the Gambia. This was to ensure the policy becomes known to all partners and stakeholders, to identify existing

participatory natural resources management regimes and approaches, to identify resource mobilisation strategies and to encourage further participation. The next steps are:

- The FFF will prepare a roadmap on sustainable resources management and share it with the ANR working group.

3. Organising market awareness meetings with the cashew farmers association and other actors along the cashew value chain.

Cashew is one of the most lucrative commodities produced in the Gambia. The FFF held a meeting, the first of its kind, which aimed to get cashew farmers and people involved in transporting, buying and exporting the commodity discussing the cashew pricing system together. The next steps are:

- The FFF will support farmer groups to legalise their status and will help form an umbrella National Cashew Farmers Organisation to enable associations, alliances and federations to network. FFF will also facilitate the establishment of regional buying centres, the identification of strategic collection centres in the districts and improved marketing, and will help groups to develop technical and management skills.
- In the coming months, the FFF aims to extend the approach used with cashew producers to other key commodities, such as honey, and will work with the ANR working group to help implement the policy and find funding opportunities for farmers and forest producer groups.

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This policy briefing draws on a national baseline study of the forest and farm sector compiled by a Gambian environmental consultancy, NACO, which undertook extensive field work in all seven regions of the Gambia. Researchers contacted a diverse range of producer groups, support and service institutions and apex bodies to get a snapshot of the current situation as well as to gather perceptions on future needs and challenges.



Knowledge Products

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Notes

¹ Other policies include the Gambia Incorporated Vision 2020 and its medium-term priority frameworks: The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II (2007–2011) and the macro-economic Framework of the Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE, 2012–2015). / ² More information in: *Enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty in the Gambia*. IFAD factsheet. See: www.ifad.org/pub/factsheet / ³ The first forest policy in 1995 emphasised involving local communities in forest management. The legal framework for formalising public and private participation in management was strengthened by revised Forest Act and Regulations (1998). A National Forest Fund was also established in 1996. The 2010–2019 Forest Policy reinforces this push for decentralisation and one of its primary objectives is improving living standards by reducing poverty enhancing forest resources. / ⁴ The process takes several years and has three phases: 1) the start-up phase, where villagers organise themselves, identify and demarcate the forest area, assess it and prepare an initial forest management plan; 2) the preliminary phase, where communities demonstrate their capacity to manage resources sustainably; and 3) the consolidation phase: before the end of the third year or 18 months, if the community demonstrates that it can successfully implement the preliminary management plans on its own, a community forest management agreement (CFMA) is issued. The CFMA permanently transfers exclusive rights to use the forest and trees to local communities, as well as responsibilities for its management. The Department of Forestry oversees each phase, but low capacity results in delays, making forest communities lose confidence in the process.