

2

Wealth ranking in the Gambia: which households participated in the FITT programme?

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• FITT programme in the Gambia

The Farmers' Innovation and Technology Testing (FITT) programme was initiated by the Gambian Department of Agricultural Research (DAR) in 1989. The project was intended to enable Gambian farmers to assess new farming technologies (such as new varieties, or new farming techniques) that were being developed by scientists at the DAR. It was also hoped that the farmers' assessments of new technologies would ensure that subsequent adaptations to the technologies would be adapted to farmers' requirements.

The FITT programme was originally inspired by the success of the Agricultural Technology Improvement Programme (ATIP) in Botswana¹. The ATIP had set up farmers' groups in Francistown and Mahalapye, where there was considerable enthusiasm for testing new technologies. In The Gambia, DAR decided to try the same approach with farmers' groups that had been set up by some NGOs. Of the eight non-governmental development agencies that had participated in the FITT programme, two villages with farmers' groups that ActionAid The Gambia had worked with were investigated. The overall objective of the study was to evaluate the value of the FITT Programme for all the farmers in the two villages. ActionAid had selected the farmers' groups in Boiram and Yonna to participate in the FITT programme. Both groups had been operational since 1985/6 and were renowned

for their responsiveness to ActionAid's previous interventions.

The first step in FITT involvement had taken place in 1989, when staff from the DAR and ActionAid met with the farmers' groups in Boiram and Yonna. The various technologies being developed at the DAR were discussed with both groups and each group made a selection of the technologies they wanted to try. The groups chose two types of trial: trials of new seed varieties, for example groundnuts, sorghum, rice & cow peas; and trials of new farming methods, such as groundnut-cereal intercropping, maize-cow pea relays. After a few initial hitches, ActionAid delivered the relevant seeds and additional information to each group. The farmers' group then allocated trials to selected group members. The majority of the trials were done twice, simultaneously by different individuals.

• PRA in Boiram and Yonna

The wealth ranking described here was part of a wider Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercise to evaluate the value of the FITT programme to all the farmers in each village. The ultimate objective of the wealth ranking was to find out who had participated in the programme. Another important topic of investigation was what actually differentiated households from each other.

The villages of Boiram and Yonna are very different in terms of size, ethnicity and farming systems. Boiram is a large Wollof village with 101 compounds, or *dabadas*. Its land overlies a sandstone plateau and the main food crop is early millet. Yonna is a smaller Mandinka village with only 17 compounds. Its

¹ Norman D., D. Baker, G. Heinrich, F. Worman (1988) Technology development and farmer groups: Experiences from Botswana. *Experimental Agriculture* 24 (3) 321-331

land straddles river swamps and the gentle escarpments away from the river. Its main food crops are rice and maize. In both villages groundnuts are cultivated as a cash crop. The ActionAid groups differed considerably in their coverage in both villages. In Boiram, less than half the women were members, whereas in Yonna every married woman and some men were members of the group.

- **Wealth ranking by cards in action**

In both villages, introductory meetings were held with separate groups of women and men. The meetings were held as soon as possible after arriving in the village - the women's meeting was held on the second day and the men's on the third day in both villages. At each meeting, the local extension worker² and myself explained why I was staying in the village and the nature of the PRA techniques I was hoping to use. We spent about an hour explaining the techniques, giving examples and answering questions. At this stage, any similarities in the studies of each village ceased.

In Boiram the introductory meetings were lively and well-attended with over 35 participants at both meetings. After a discussion of the techniques, the women's meeting was keen to start with the wealth ranking. This was the last technique to be explained and discussed. I had left this until last in case it proved to be insensitive. However, this was not the case. There was some initial hesitation over who should be the respondent but soon the whole group joined in. The next day, the men had heard all about the wealth ranking, and after the meeting they were keen to start also.

In Yonna the atmosphere was completely different. The rains had started and everybody was working very hard to plant their crops. As

² In the first village, Boiram, the local extension worker was Landing Sanyang, the Ministry of Agriculture village extension worker. It was he, rather than the Action Aid extension worker, who had supervised the FITT trials. In the second village, Yonna, the local extension worker was Kantong Marrenah, the ActionAid Agricultural Assistant. He supervised the FITT trials in Yonna.

a result, the introductory meetings were less well attended, less than 20 participants, and after an hour or so the participants were keen to go. There was no time for an hour and half of group wealth ranking. The local extension worker and myself therefore fitted visits into the busy schedules of different individuals during the evening and morning after the women's meeting. As a result the wealth ranking was finished before the men's meeting.

- **In Boiram**

The first step of the wealth ranking involved a decision about what unit to rank. The compound is the largest family unit and consists of all the people living within an area enclosed by a common fence. The head of a compound is usually the oldest male and he will allocate farming land to the other men and women in the compound. A *dabada* is a farming unit, or a group of people within a compound that farm together to provide food for a communal store. A *sinkiro* is the group of people within a compound but not necessarily within a *dabada*, that eat from the same cooking pot. Each of these units are common groupings in most Gambian villages. After discussions with the village extension worker (VEW) and two of the primary school teachers, we decided to rank the village by compound rather than by *dabada* (there can be one or more farming units within a compound). This decision was mainly dictated by the large number of compounds in the village as working with smaller units would have become a cumbersome task. Landing Sanyang, the VEW, then wrote the name of the head of each compound on separate pieces of paper.

In Boiram, the rains had not arrived and most of the village was anxiously waiting for the rain to start. This meant that they had slightly more time for group discussions than in Yonna. At the end of the first meeting with the village women, the group was keen to get on with the wealth ranking immediately. We asked for volunteers and a few group members hesitantly came forward. However, everybody had decided to stay and listen and within 15 minutes several women were shouting out their opinions from the back of the group. The introductory meeting with the men was held

the next day, Friday, after two pm prayers. Having heard all about the women's meeting the day before, all the men stayed behind to participate in the wealth ranking.

After agreeing with each group on a Wolof term to describe 'well-being', George Mendy, a school teacher who was interpreting, read out the names of two compounds to the group. He asked the group to compare them and to say which compound was better off. This was done for every compound and two initial groups of compounds were derived. This pair-wise comparison was useful to get the participants 'into the swing' of wealth-ranking. However as pairs of compounds were compared at random, if two poorer compounds were compared and then two richer compounds were compared, each group of the two piles would contain a range of compounds from richest to poorest.

Next the compounds from one pile were named and it became clear that they did, in fact, vary widely. The group was asked to create groups of compounds that had similar levels of well-being, and the groups of compounds were arranged in ascending order of well-being. Several piles were created by both groups. Throughout the wealth ranking with both groups, there was much shouting,

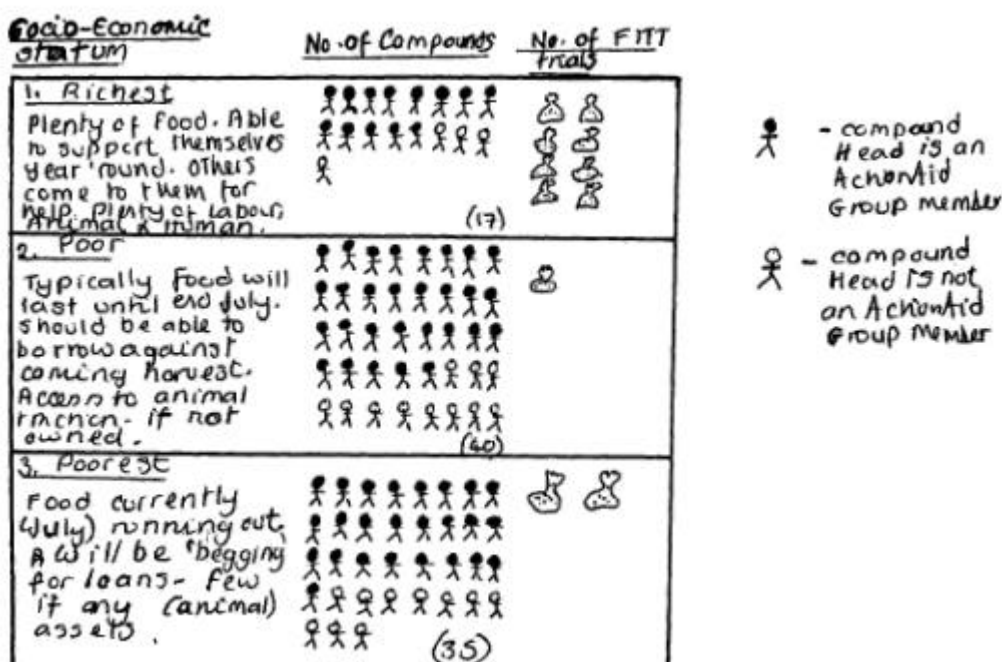
laughter and discussion about how well off particular compounds were. They were clear about ranking compounds rather than individuals: *We're not talking about the money under his bed, we're thinking about his family*".

After all the compounds had been sorted into groups, the names in each pile were read out and checked with the informants. Each household was given a separate score for the rank it was given by each group. The eventual ranking was derived from the average of the two scores given by the men's and the women's groups. The results are shown in Figure 1.

• In Yonna

When I arrived in Yonna, the entire village was working nearly every day-light hour. The rains had been late and had just started. It was difficult to arrange meetings and discussion groups and so the wealth ranking had to be done with individuals 'caught' at the beginning or end of their day on an opportunistic basis. Also the informants in Yonna seemed to be more at ease in their own homes rather than at the village meeting place.

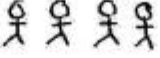
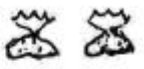


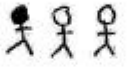





Figure 1. Results of wealth ranking in Boiram, July 1991






As there were only 17 compounds in Yonna, the ActionAid agricultural assistant, Kantong Marrenah, and I decided to rank the 25 *dabadas* (farming units) in the village. At the first introductory meeting with the village women, they rushed off to their rice fields as soon as we had finished talking. The village men were also very busy and their introductory meeting had to be postponed until after the women's wealth ranking altogether.

Kantong and I facilitated wealth ranking with five individual informants in separate sessions. The names of *dabada* heads and the Mandinka term for well-being were discussed with each informant. The informants placed the cards directly into groups of ascending order of well-being, without first doing a pair-wise comparison. The small number of cards made this possible.

Figure 2. Results of wealth ranking by dabadas in Yonna, July 1991

status or Ranking of Group	Number of Dabadas	Number of FITT Trials
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

-  - one dabada
-  - a dabada where there is a male member of the AA group (There were female members of AA group in every dabada)
-  - represents one FITT trial undertaken

As in Boiram, each *dabada* was given a score for the rank it was allocated by each informant. The final rankings were an average of these five scores and can be seen in Figure 2. The names of the farmers that had undertaken FITT trials were obtained from ActionAid records and cross-checked with the extension workers and the farmers themselves. The extension worker then worked out which compound or *dabada*, the farmer belonged to and for each trial that had been done by a member of the compound or *dabada*, a mark was made beside that unit on the wealth ranking chart, as can be seen in Figure 2.

In both Boiram and Yonna the calculated rankings were drawn up in the form of pictorial charts, just as in Figures 1 and 2, and presented to the villagers at feedback meetings.

- **Different process and results**

The process of wealth ranking in each village was quite different. In Boiram, groups were happy to spend time discussing the relative - well-being of the compounds in their village, whereas in Yonna, farmers were busy planting their crops and were reluctant to spend more time than absolutely necessary in group discussions. The most immediate explanation is the fact that in Boiram farmers, were waiting for the rains to arrive and had more time than the farmers of Yonna to spend in group meetings. However there are many other differences between the villages, for example their size, their ethnicity, and farming systems, which could have some bearing on nature of the wealth ranking exercises in each village.

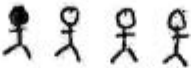
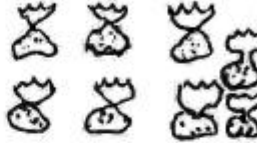
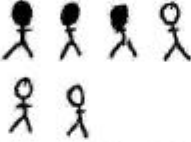





In Boiram we found that the main determinant of well-being was the availability of food and,


to a smaller extent, the availability of animal labour. The richest households had year round food security while the poorest were currently begging for food. The chart in Figure 1 shows that a large majority (8 of the 11) of the FITT trials involved the richest households.


In Yonna, the main differences between *dabadas* was their consumer to worker ratio, i.e. a *dabada* was well of if it had plenty of hands-to-help in comparison to mouths-to-feed. Another important differential was the possibility of remittances from outside the village. For example, the Gambian rock star, Demba Conteh, was born in Yonna and had sent several people from the village for the Haj in Mecca. As can be seen in Figure 2, the allocation of FITT trials was more even in Yonna.


One theory for the difference in the well-being differentials between the villages is that because it had rained in Yonna and everybody was working very hard, this made labour seem much more important than it might have done if Yonna was still waiting for rain as the people of Boiram were. The different wealth groups may also be because in Boiram, compounds were compared whereas in Yonna, *dabadas* were compared. Figure 3 shows the ranking of only those *dabada* heads that are also compound heads in Yonna. In this case, as in Boiram, there is a clear bias of FITT trials participation by the richer households. However in Yonna this was explained by the ActionAid group president who said she had rigorously allocated FITT trials to the hardest working households. As the availability of labour determines well being, this would explain the concentration of trials in those households at the top of the scale.

Figure 3. Results of the wealth ranking by compounds, Yonna, July 1991

Status or Ranking of Group	Number of compounds	Number of FITT Trials
1		
2		
3		
4		

 - one compound.

 - a compound where there is a male member of the AA group.

 - represents one FITT trial undertaken

- Pros and cons of wealth ranking by cards**

The wealth ranking in both villages clearly demonstrated which households were participating in the FITT programme. However the wealth ranking did not shed any light on the distribution of ActionAid group membership. Figure 1 shows relatively comprehensive village membership. The fact

that less than half the village women in Boiram were members was not highlighted by the wealth ranking. This leads me to ask how wealth ranking can be used to investigate intra-household issues.

The two wealth ranking exercises have shown that there are advantages and disadvantages of working in groups and working with individuals. There is a trade-off between the ability of a group to correct an informant when

there is disagreement and the ability of the group to inhibit informants from being frank. On the other hand, with individual interviews there is a trade-off between the ability of an individual to exaggerate, for example, and the freedom she/he has to speak her/his mind.

The wealth ranking in Boiram was enjoyed by all the participants and has shown that it can be both fun and informative. However in Yonna, the exercise took up the valuable farming and relaxation time of the informants. It is important to consider the time available for the wealth ranking exercise, or any other investigative method, and think about how to use that time most efficiently.

• **Conclusions**

Three key aspects appeared from the wealth ranking exercises I carried out in Boiram and Yonna.

Firstly, I noticed a large difference in attitudes, in appropriate ranking procedures, and even in results. It is difficult to ascertain the reasons for this diversity. The arrival of the rains definitely had some effect, but how did tribal customs influence these? How attributable was the diversity in the wealth ranking to the size of the village or the size of the ActionAid group?

In answer to these questions, I would say that the arrival of the rains, which were late and sorely needed (the previous years' harvest had been minimal), was a critical influence on the ability of farmers to participate in group discussions. Thus it would be impossible to accurately attribute these differences to any other factors. However, the different sizes of the villages did affect the size of the units that were ranked and it is likely that the depth of respondents' knowledge of the well-being of different units affected the criteria and accuracy of the wealth ranking exercises.

Second, the wealth ranking showed that in neither village did the FITT programme reach the poorest households. Wealth ranking identified a problem and to solve it, more explicit targeting of those most in need would be needed to offset the existing bias.

Finally, the different experiences with wealth ranking in Boiram and Yonna show the need to be flexible in the application of the process, but also to be aware of the effect of the process on the results of the wealth ranking.

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