

The Gambia-GEF National Dialogue Seminar

22 – 23 September 2004

Recommendations and follow-up actions

A national dialogue seminar was held in The Gambia from 22nd – 23rd September 2004 to strengthen the understanding of issues relating to the GEF coordination at the national level, to engage in a two-way dialogue with the GEF about opportunities and constraints of cooperation, and to identify priority areas for future intervention.

The seminar was organised by The National Environment Agency in collaboration with the UNDP Country Office, the GEF Secretariat and the UNDP/GEF Coordination Office in New York. The GEF Secretariat provided seven resource persons who presented different topics regarding GEF governance structures, project life cycle, incremental costs and other relevant information on the GEF. There were also presentations by Gambian resource persons on the country's environmental policies, Poverty Alleviation strategies, localization of the Millennium Development Goals, energy policies, land degradation, biodiversity and climate change adaptation policies. The seminar was well attended by over 110 major stakeholders from academia, the private sector, NGO community and government. The third day of the seminar, 24th September, was used to visit a project site for a marine and coastal biodiversity management project funded by the GEF, and a reserved bird sanctuary

After two days of intensive dialogue, the participants identified a number of priority issues, actions and recommendations to be adopted in the coming three-year period in order to strengthen the country's engagement in GEF Operational Programmes.

Key Recommendations

(1). National GEF Coordination Committee

In 1997, a national GEF committee was formed under the auspices of the NEA to handle all matters concerning GEF activities in The Gambia. Membership to the committee was drawn from seven key institutions namely:

- The National Environment Agency (NEA).
- The UNDP Country Office
- The Department of Forestry
- The Department of Water Resources
- The Department of Parks and Wildlife Management
- The Islamic Relief Association (ISRA).
- The Gambia Rural Development Agency (GARDA).

In its early years, the committee was very instrumental in facilitating access to GEF funds for enabling activity projects in biodiversity and Climate Change. Of recent however, the committee has not been active in its functions due to a number of factors.

Given the important role of the National GEF Committee, the participants to the National Dialogue Seminar made recommendations to restructure and revitalize the committee to meet the new challenges. Their recommendations include the following:

- The National GEF Committee should hold regular meetings in future, at least one in every quarter.
- The committee should be expanded to include among others, The Department of State for Finance and Economic Affairs.
- To invite the new members to the next meeting of the National Committee.
- To engage the National Committee more effectively in disseminating information about the GEF.
- To revise the mandate of the committee to include the following:
 - Establishing linkages and synergies in the implementation of the Rio conventions.
 - Identifying potential counterpart funding for GEF co-financing
 - Synthesizing national priority areas and linking them to the 15 GEF Operational Programmes.

In light of these recommendations, the restructured National GEF Committee will now be made up of the following institutions:

- The National Environment Agency.
- The Department of State for Finance and Economic Affairs.
- The Department of State for Fisheries, Natural Resources and the Environment.
- The Department of Water Resources.
- The Department of Forestry.
- The Department of Parks and Wildlife Management.
- The Association of Non Governmental Organisations (TANGO).
- The UNDP-Banjul.
- The Policy Analysis Unit, Office of The President.

The primary function of the Committee will be to coordinate all GEF matters within The Gambia and to serve as the major link between The Gambia and the GEF on the otherhand. The other functions of the committee include but not limited to the following:

- Serve as a Clearing House mechanism for all GEF project proposals;
- Monitor all GEF-funded projects and programmes within the country;
- Disseminate relevant information about the GEF to stakeholders;
- Identify and mobilise additional funds for GEF co-financing;
- Identify synergies among the projects or programmes submitted for review and to ensure that actors work towards achieving synergy where possible; and

- Ensure that GEF-funded projects/programmes address The Gambia's development priorities.

The NEA in its capacity the GEF Operational Focal Point for The Gambia will serve both as the Chair and Secretariat to the National GEF Committee.

The committee will hold its first meeting in the first week of November during which it will review and adopt its work plan for 2005.

(2). National Priority areas for GEF intervention

At the national seminar, the participants identified a number of priority issues, which were considered important for The Gambia. Although the list below identifies the priority areas for GEF intervention, it was recommended that each programme area should address concrete issues relating to **conflict resolution** and **capacity building**.

(a) Integrated Coastal Management linked to Climate Change adaptation strategies considering the synergies between the UNCBD and the UNFCCC.

Coastal degradation, including erosion of the coastline, is an important national issue for The Gambia. As a low-lying country, The Gambia is likely to be adversely affected by sea level rise resulting from climate change. Biological diversity loss is also an important issue adversely affecting The Gambia. Between the 2 conventions, there are common areas of concern and strong linkages between the CBD and UNFCCC. For the execution of a coastal zone management programme, there are a number of sectors with a stake and would therefore require an integrated approach.

(b) Sustainable natural resources management and improvements to sustainable livelihoods linking the synergies of the Rio conventions.

In order to come up with a more sustainable approach to natural resources management, it is necessary to improve the living standards of the resource users. This option could be achieved through the promotion of income generating activities and exploring other opportunities to reduce the pressure on the resources. The joint work programme initiatives of the Rio conventions offer many opportunities for achieving synergies and linking these options to sustainable livelihoods.

(c) Capacity building and enhancement of NGO/Civil society participation in GEF related activities.

In general, NGOs and Civil society organisations have weak capacities and require assistance in capacity building. The situation is more critical for local NGOs who are often constrained by lack of financial and human resources. As key collaborators with

government in rural development activities and natural resources management, NGOs and civil society organisations could greatly contribute to the country's overall development if their capacities are enhanced.

(d) Improvement of public sector and civil society partnership.

Recent government policies have taken a shift in favor of engaging the private sector in the area of environment and natural resources management. Although it may be too early to make judgements, preliminary indications seem to suggest that there are indeed many opportunities for government to forge partnerships with the private sector and achieve the desired results.

(e) Exploration of opportunities for access to the GEF Small Grants Programme by using the available funds from the GEF Focal Point Support.

The participants to the seminar strongly recommended that the GEF Operational focal Point explore as a matter of urgency, the possibilities of The Gambia participating in the Small Grants Programme of the GEF. Due to the urgency of the matter and the strong desire of the Gambia to participate in the programme, the workshop also went further to recommend that the GEF Operational Focal Point use the resources from the support to the focal point to initiate this important task.

(f) Preparation of a detailed workplan for the focal point support to:

- **disseminate information about the GEF.**
- **encourage stronger NGO motivation through regular meetings.**
- **advocate for stronger government commitment.**

Immediately after the conclusion of the national seminar, The National GEF Committee was constituted to include additional new members as recommended by the workshop. In the next coming three years, the committee will assume a more proactive role in coordinating all GEF matters in The Gambia. The committee will draw up a work plan for each year, convene meetings on a quarterly basis and conduct a series of sensitization programmes throughout the country with a view to raising the level of awareness about the role of the GEF as a partner in improving the global environment. It is hoped that these efforts will lead to a better understanding with the GEF and result in a strong partnership between the GEF and The Gambia.