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Linking Agro-Forestry with Smallholder Livestock Production — A strategy for Participatory Forest Management with Communities in the Central River Division of The Gambia

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Abstract

The Central River Division Forestry project (CRDFPII) in the second 5-year phase aims to support the Forestry Department (FD) to implement the Gambian Forest Management Concept (GFMC), whose main thrust is the involvement of communities in sustainable forest management for present and future generations. During the first half of the phase I of the project, a rather conventional approach was adopted for the management of Forest Parks (FP). Exploitation for grazing, fuel wood collection and other forest products were allowed but management was still with the FD, without the direct involvement of the livestock sector although livestock population in CRD constitute about 40 % of the national cattle population. Consequently, illegal exploitation was rampant, bush fires were on the increase and forest degradation continued unabated. These experiences led to the initiative for the involvement of the Livestock Department, the International Trypanotolerance Centre (ITC) and other stakeholders. The purpose of this partnership is to develop synergies between forestry and livestock production and to use livestock as one of the entry points for FP management. A three-tier activity level was proposed: interventions within and outside the forests, and sociological measures to improve communal attitude towards forestry management. All activities were fully supported by the Gambian Forest Communication Concept (GFCC). Participatory tools were the vehicles used to develop and implement activities. There was a great improvement in community participation in sustainable forest management, which translated into signing joint management agreement with over 40 communities, establishment of 8,000 fodder trees around forest borders, and degraded or encroached forest parks. Fire management was considerably improved. The incidence of bush fires reduced from between 70 % to 85 % annual figures to less than 10 % during the current year. The partnership also saw the emergence of communal groups such as forest committees and Livestock Owners Associations (LOA). Although livestock integration is a *viable option* for sustainable forest management, there is need for controlled grazing practices.

Keywords: Forest park management, fodder trees, green belt, sensitisation, Gambia